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Being Black in a White Gateway Institution

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Being black in a white gateway institution

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to the twenty-one respondents who graciously shared their life stories.

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ABSTRACT

After more than 50 years since *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, Blacks and other historically under-represented racial and ethnic groups still graduate from post-secondary educational institutions at disproportionately lower numbers than Whites. Many initiatives hoping to increase the attainment of a baccalaureate degree for racial minority students have focused on barriers these students encounter at the four-year college level. This project studies the educational experiences of Black students at a predominantly White community college for two reasons: the majority of students of color begin their higher education at community colleges, and their quality of life indicators equalize with other groups after the attainment of the four-year degree. Twenty-one African-born and U.S.-born Black female and male students were interviewed. Phenomenology and grounded theory were combined to gather and analyze interview data. Findings reveal that Black students use one of four racial identity standpoints (*separation*, *reluctant acceptance*, *alternate*, and *ambivalence*) as they 1) navigate the common barrier of being stereotyped as generic Black students and 2) attempt to access processes of learning on the predominantly White community college campus.

PREFACE: MY MOTIVATIONS/RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

There is almost always a story behind research projects. This research has been more than a decade in the making. It has resulted from, and occurred alongside, my own process of education. It now even leads me through the final hoop of my Doctoral program. I have been teaching for fourteen years at the college level, thirteen of which have been at the community college. I am a White female who has taken the traditional path through education after graduating from high school (going to a small private college for four years, and then attending a state university for two to earn a Master's degree). During these six years, I took my educational opportunities for granted. After graduating and then working in "the field" (social work types of jobs) for several years, I received a one-year appointment to teach full time at a local four-year college. At the end of the appointment, I was back in "the field," but knew that I wanted to make my career in higher education. Several years later, a full-time teaching position became available at the local community college and I was hired. I have been teaching at this college for the past eleven years.

My journey in becoming a race-conscious instructor has been long and is ever-evolving. I was raised as a class-privileged White female in a White community. I did not start to become aware of my privilege until a year or two after teaching at the community college. This awareness started out as being bothered/irritated/intrigued by the numbers of students of color who either failed my classes or dropped before courses were complete. Now, reflecting on my experiences, I am a bit embarrassed to admit that my early conclusions stemmed from one generalization: The students struggled because they simply were not trying hard enough.

As I taught over the next eight or so years, I shifted my belief to include more intrapersonal, contextual, and/or structural explanations as to why students of color had both higher drop and lower achievement levels than did White students. Eight years ago as of this writing, a young Latina took a class from me. Our experience together finally allowed me the opportunity to understand that low achievement levels by students of color had more to do with systemic barriers than with, simply, individual student motivation. She took a course option to do service learning at the local domestic violence shelter in place of an exam. Because she took this option, she and I had regular one-on-one meetings throughout the course of the semester, and I got to know her very well. During one of our meetings, she was crying and explained to me that she was not going to be able to finish her project as planned. When I asked why, she explained that a required part of the service learning project was to attend training at the state capital four hours away. She explained that she was to take the bus with the other members of the shelter and she needed identification to do so (this occurred post-9/11). She then explained that she was an undocumented immigrant and did not have valid ID, and due to her financial situation, she was not able to access personal transportation. I remember listening to her that day with a new realization of the "different" realities that students who were not class- or race-privileged faced on a regular basis—and that I, as a class-privileged White instructor, had been very oblivious to these different realities.

Shortly after this experience, I proposed two new course offerings at the college: One was a Race and Ethnic Relations class and the other was entitled, *Men, Women, and Society*. My hope was three-fold: First, to provide a classroom space for students who saw themselves as "outside" or "other" due to sex or race; second, to spread awareness of marginalized

realities and experiences to students of dominant gender and race; third, to give me, the instructor, an officially-sanctioned space within the institution to learn about these issues. After teaching these courses once, it became clear I needed more formal training, and I enrolled in a Sociology doctoral program. As a Ph.D. candidate, I have continued my full-time teaching appointment. This dual obligation has been challenging, but beneficial in that it has allowed me to integrate my learning into my own courses.

Another teaching experience solidified my commitment to expanding and enhancing my race-conscious teaching. Three years ago, a young Black female was in my *Introduction to Sociology* class. She was a recent transplant from the historically Black Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia, to Iowa. She was unlike any student I had ever had: Her learning was very political and race-conscious. She was asking things of me that no Black student or other student of color ever had: “Why are you presenting these certain statistics on race?”, and “have you read Cornel West?”, “have you heard Michael Eric Dyson speak?”, “what do you think of the Black History and Culture Museum in Chicago?”, “what are you doing for Black History Month?”. These questions took me aback. Much to my discomfort, my answers to many of her questions followed along the lines of, “No, I don’t know”, and, “nothing”.

I invited her to join the *Race and Ethnic Relations* class for the semester, and her questions and knowledge was as challenging to me as the course content was to the rest of the students. Her willingness to share with me her perspectives on race has given me a template from which to begin to understand the meaning of race consciousness and to try teaching from that perspective. There have been other students of color over the last several years who have come forward to share their perspectives regarding their racialization. As I taught more and more from a race-conscious perspective, I found an increase in the number

of students of color in my classes, and an increase in the percentage of them who not only pass, but thrive and expand their understanding of the course curriculum.

In the spring semester of 2007, a truly incredible experience set the topic of this dissertation in motion. I faced for the first time in my teaching career a class that had a numeric minority of White students and numeric majority of Black students. The enrollment for *Men, Women and Society* is usually around fifteen. The enrollment for this particular semester was fourteen: Six Black students and eight White students (four of whom dropped). After the four White students dropped in the first week, the final racial composition was six Black students and four White students.

This racial composition of the students had a profound impact on my teaching and on the interactions in the class. The Black students actively dominated much of the classroom space with classroom conversation, questions about the material, and reactions to the curriculum. What quickly became obvious to me was how "White" the curriculum was. By "White curriculum", I mean that there was an absence of reading material authored by Blacks or other writers of color, a lack of gender-related issues that addressed the reality of being Black, and an overall assumption that the topics covered in class equally applied to all men and women. In short, the course topics were normative and therefore most applicable to Whites. I had forgotten that Whiteness is normative and invisible to most Whites, and even to me as a White instructor. The Black students in class saw that the default focus of the course material was White. When this reality became clear to me, I worked to include issues specifically germane to Blacks and other people of color. In order to make this shift, I had to listen to the students and give them an opportunity to discuss and choose the topics we would cover in the course. This change required that I not only shift topics, but that I also give the

students more control over the direction of the class. In the end, the experience was the most rewarding and humbling of my teaching career and it appeared to be rewarding and energizing for both the Black and the White students.

While that course was my most rewarding teaching experience, it also left me with the most questions. Could this type of “free space” or control over the topics, readings, discussions, and activities be given to students of color and White students alike in classrooms where there is a numeric minority of Black students? What role does, or could, the institution play in this type of teaching—either covertly or overtly? What were the actual experiences of students of color in this class? What might the essences of the experiences of other Black students be at this predominantly White community college? How could the voices of these students be heard and recognized? What do these voices have to say?

Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to allow these voices to be heard. In doing so, it is political research. I hope this research will have an impact on the institution at which it takes place and on the respondents. I know it will be a positive experience for me as I experience “meaningful praxis”. As bell hooks (1994) states, all that is believed and thought of by an individual must be lived by them. There needs to be a melding of theory and practice. What I mean to glean from this project is an understanding of the essences of the experiences of Black students at a White community college. This understanding gives me necessary information to meld my current information and curriculum with the way I teach (my practice). This is meaningful praxis. It is political, liberatory, conscious, and accepting of the view that the meaning making of all individuals is valid.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. community college institution was initially developed in the 1960s with the overt goal of providing vocational and two-year liberal arts educational opportunities to the general public. This development followed a series of political and economic shifts in the first 60 years of the twentieth century. The continued industrialization and use of technology in the United States' economy during the early part of the twentieth century set the stage for an increase in the need for citizens to become formally educated beyond the high school level. At the end of World War II (WWII) in 1946, the G.I. Bill of Rights and Veterans Rehabilitation Act caused the number of college students to swell considerably. This increase in enrollment put stress on an already strained system in need of reform. President H.S. Truman responded to the pressure on post-secondary education by creating the Commission on Higher Education for Democracy, part of which included free two-year community colleges to provide for the educational opportunity of all citizens.

Additionally, there were political changes in American society that influenced the need for more citizens to access higher education. By the end of WWII, the United States' domestic agenda focused on efforts to illustrate to the rest of the world what an advanced and true democracy looked like. After fighting injustice and genocide abroad, the United States was no longer able to support a domestic agenda of inequality and segregation. Due to these economic and political changes, institutions of education gained greater importance.

The landmark legal case *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* in 1954 followed this movement for greater equality in society. In *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* the question was whether racial separation provided "equal" educational opportunities, or if racial integration would provide equality. The central question in *Brown vs. the Topeka*

Board of Education was the historical intent of the Fourteenth Amendment[1]. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, who wrote the majority opinion[2], stated that "we cannot turn the clock back" to understand the social context of the intent of the amendment, so as a result Black children must be recognized as having full and equal protection of the Fourteenth Amendment. *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* "separate but equal" doctrine, stating "separate but equal" has no place in the field of education. "To separate them [Black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone" (Warren 1954:7).

The belief in education as a cornerstone of citizenship was emphasized by Truman and further defined by the *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* decision. *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* affected how citizens viewed themselves. It meant that minorities of different types (gender, age, and race) were defined as citizens with equal rights. Furthermore, tenets of L.B. Johnson's Great Society and his passage of the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* fueled assertiveness for both social and political movements for racial equality in all facets of life—including education.

As a college system with low-cost open admission, the community college's mission flowed directly from the prevailing political philosophy that permeated society at the time. This philosophy, as applied to the educational system, focused on opening up previously blocked pathways for more populations of people to access post-secondary education. In the 1960s, the community college's original and overt premise was to democratize higher education[3]. Interestingly, even though the *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* decision

in part may have influenced the formation of a community college system, specific mention of racial minorities did not appear in the legal code that created the community college—at least not until a revision in 1995[4]. This revision, entitled, *Academic Incentives for Minorities Program*, provided funds for minority students going into fields of study in which they had been historically underrepresented.

To meet the goal of democratizing education, the initial stages of community college development in the 1960s included various functions: equalizing post-secondary educational opportunities for previously underserved groups and providing job-specific training to prepare workers for an (at the time) advancing manufacturing economy. Community colleges, developed and funded by federal and state governments, became defined as, "an institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen and Brawer 2008:5). They still perform these functions today.

Several contemporary debates surround these functions, including whether or not community colleges actually provide a venue for students to matriculate to four-year institutions and obtain baccalaureate degrees: (It is at this point that the earning gap narrows between dominant and subordinate racial groups). Alternatively, there is concern over whether community colleges become merely a "cooling off" place for students from underrepresented groups to get re-tracked into vocational (lower status and pay) occupations.

Another debate pivots around whether equal access to a system of higher education alone can result in equal educational attainment. The government has taken action to ensure equal access to higher education by the ruling over *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, and more recently by upholding Affirmative Action in the University of Michigan Law School case[5]. However, there has been no such action taken to ensure and to regulate

equal access to education once inside the college doors (that is, inside the curriculum, the classroom and in student life activities). If the community college is truly going to equalize post-secondary educational opportunities for all citizens (including underrepresented racial groups), then equal access to the system of higher education itself, and access to learning and opportunities once within the system, need to be understood as different and distinct, but of equal importance in achieving equal educational attainment.

Overarching Research Problem

Community colleges are a state-sponsored way of providing access to all citizens who wish to attend college. The first iterations of support for a Community College system date as far back as Harry S. Truman's 1947 Commission on Higher Education for Democracy. *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* in 1954, along with President L.B. Johnson's call for equal access to higher education (in support of his "Great Society"), also contributed to the establishment of a national community college system in the mid-1960s.

Truman's Commission and Johnson's Great Society both called for equal access to education, regardless of race, class, or gender. Johnson more specifically stated that a goal of his administration was to create racial justice and to eliminate poverty. *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, which specifically focused on issues surrounding equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution, was interpreted as mandating equal access to education for Blacks and Whites. Essentially, these political shifts regarding equal education along racial lines availed all citizens with access to higher education. This equal access, via a community college system, was to prepare citizens to work in the economy and provide them

with local options for academic learning and in turn prepare them to live effectively in contemporary society.

Today, it has been more than 50 years since *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* and Blacks[6] and other historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups still graduate from post-secondary educational institutions at disproportionately lower numbers than Whites[7]. While it is true that *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* has affected all underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and their access to higher education by eliminating segregation, educational success along racial lines continues to be unequal. If community colleges were developed as a response to the political and economic shifts in the mid-twentieth century for equal access to education, then it is reasonable to expect community colleges to produce equal educational attainment by race, as well as any other demographic marker of difference, such as class, age, or gender.

A broader variety of students attend two-year community colleges than four-year postsecondary institutions because of open admission, low cost and community availability. Student demographics at community colleges often include both highly prepared and marginally prepared students. There is also a great diversity of age, socio-economic background, and racial background of students at community colleges. While community colleges offer equal access to college, students of different demographic categories do not graduate or matriculate to four-year colleges in equal numbers. To further understand this phenomenon, this project focuses on gaining an understanding of the processes behind disproportionately low matriculation rates of Black community college students.

Because Blacks have a unique history of slavery in the United States, the meanings of Blackness in daily life and being Black in White educational institutions are uniquely

experienced. This project seeks to understand, using insights gained from Black community college students, processes that affect educational outcomes for Black students.

Specifically, this project asks the following research question: In an educational institution purposefully developed to offer equal access to college for all citizens, what experiences, from the perspectives of Black students currently enrolled in transfer courses at the community college, affect equal educational experiences and outcomes?

The Community College as a Gateway Institution

The community college system spans the United States with campuses in almost every state and in most commonwealths and territories[8]. When illustrating the size of community college undergraduate populations by number or percentage, their presence is considerable. Community colleges, by current estimates, enroll between six and eight million students yearly—35 to 40 percent of all college undergraduates (Dowd 2007; 2008 NCES report). Furthermore, the community college system has grown steadily since its inception in the 1960s. In the fall of 1963, community colleges enrolled 739,811 students. That number climbed to over 6.2 million by the fall of 2006 (NCES 2008).

One attraction of community colleges is low tuition and fees: $2,017 average annual cost to attend a community college compares favorably to $5,685 to attend a public four-year institution, and $20,492 to attend a private four-year college (NCES 2008). This low cost attracts students from across the socio-economic spectrum, but primarily students from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Students from the lowest quarter of SES families generally have the highest rate of enrollment in community colleges (NCES 2008).

Because community colleges target traditionally marginalized populations a higher percentage of such students attend. Along with higher percentages of poor students, community colleges enroll a greater percentage of first generation college students (41percent compared to 27 percent at 4-year public institutions), single parents (17 percent at community colleges as opposed to 6 percent at 4-year public institutions), and students from traditionally racially subordinated groups (NCES 2008) than do other higher learning institutions. During the 2003–04 academic year, Blacks made up a larger percent of the student population at community colleges than they did at four-year institutions: 15 percent of community college students were Black, compared to 10 percent of four-year students (NCES 2008).

However, persistence or attainment rates of students at community colleges are currently lower than at four-year institutions. For example, according to the 2008 NCES report, almost 40 percent of community college students had dropped out before obtaining a certificate or degree. In theory, despite lower persistence or attainment rates, the community college system serves as a gateway to a baccalaureate degree. However, this inequality in graduation and transfer rates is of great concern. It is not enough simply to ensure equal access to education; it is also important to ensure a community college experience that provides opportunities for success, which is a necessary condition for the attainment of a four-year degree (*Social Science Research Council Project* 2005).

The community college is the most frequently attempted path to an undergraduate degree by Blacks (Karen 2002). According to Anderson et al., it is with the completion of a bachelor's degree where economic and racial parity begin. In order to ensure racial equity in educational attainment, the community college path to a baccalaureate degree should be just

as effective in culminating in a bachelor's degree as the traditional four-year path (Anderson et al. 2006; Cook 2008; Karen 2002).

Multiple factors influence the impact of race on transferring from community colleges to 4-year institutions, some of which include educational aspirations, gender, age, and socioeconomic status (SES). Historically, Blacks have lower transfer rates in comparison to Whites. Since the 1990s, the gap in transfer rates between Blacks and Whites has narrowed and, in some studies, has become statistically insignificant (Dougherty and Kienzl 2006). Nevertheless, SES and race are still found to be significant factors that impact transfer rates—in part, because race and class background can combine to produce consistent disparities in educational attainment.

Blacks are disproportionately over-represented in lower SES categories. Therefore, when viewed across the socio-economic spectrum, the Black/White transfer gap is still present (Dougherty and Kienzl 2006). Blacks, because of class and race disadvantage, are also more likely to start college at the community college level, to have non-traditional enrollment patterns, to work more hours while going to college, to have higher rates of part-time attendance, and to have more periods of "stopping-out" (Wassmer, Moore and Shulock 2004). Conversely, traditional students (most frequently White) who have no break in their enrollment from high school and continue throughout the next four years uninterrupted have the highest transfer and baccalaureate attainment rates.

Furthermore, this racial/SES transfer gap widens when examining the characteristics of community college students who transfer to highly-selective four-year colleges. There is a definite class advantage for community college students who transfer to highly-selective four-year colleges. Half of all community college students who transfer to such institutions

are from the highest one-fifth SES, whereas only seven percent are from the two lowest fifths combined (Dowd, Cheslock and Melguizo 2008).

It is also important to consider that the clearest indicator of whether or not a student achieves a baccalaureate degree is the academic rigor of his or her high school curriculum (Wassmer et al. 2004). Since predominantly Black high schools are usually among the lowest-funded, and graduates from those schools are among the least academically prepared, such students tend to be automatically excluded from the group most likely to achieve a baccalaureate degree. There is little the community college can do about the funding and rigor of high schools, but realizing this problem exists suggests a need to understand the role community colleges often play in not just getting Black students in the door of the community college, but also in understanding how to help them make up for a lack of high school preparation.

Community colleges, as gateway institutions, were specifically designed to offer equal access to college for all citizens with the intent of equal educational outcomes for all students. However, if education is not equalized here, neither is it likely to be equalized at traditional four-year institutions—a disparity that, should it continue, would likely result in the persistence of inequality in life indicators between Blacks and Whites. A simple comparison between degree attainment and annual earning supports this conclusion. Certificate degree holders from the community college system have a 5–15 percent income-level advantage over high school graduates. Earning an associate's degree equates to 15–30 percent advantage, whereas a bachelor's degree entitles the graduate to a 30–40 percent advantage in yearly income (Grubb 2002; Kane and Rouse 1999; Kienzl 2004; Marcotte et al. 2005).

Achieving a baccalaureate means higher yearly and lifetime earnings. It also is associated with other quality of life indicators, including lower stress and greater longevity. According to Jemal, Thun, Ward, Henley, Cokkinides and Murray (2008), approximately 45 percent of deaths of Black, Hispanic and White women and men, age 25–64, would not have happened if all people experienced the same death rate as college graduates. According to this study, the average life years lost by Blacks who had not completed high school was 6.7 years. For Whites who had not completed high school, it was 4.8 years. The disparity of 1.9 years shrinks when looking at Blacks and Whites who completed a baccalaureate degree: A total of 1.9 years lost for Blacks and 1.1 years for Whites. DeWalt, Berkman, Sheridan, Lohr and Pignone (2004) also found that racial minorities were disproportionately affected by the positive correlation between literacy issues (reading ability, specifically) and health outcomes. They found that health problems such as diabetes, hypertension, HIV, depression and migraines were less common among those with greater literacy.

Additionally, Blacks (males in particular) are commonly subject to racial microaggressions[9] that are generally understood to be insults directed either overtly or covertly at people of color. Microaggressions constitute instances of subtle racism based on racial stereotypes. These instances frequently go unnoticed by Whites and unaddressed by Blacks because microaggressions are seemingly small and inconsequential, and therefore difficult to address. The greatest harm of microaggressions is in their cumulative effects on the lives of Blacks who experience them. These effects contribute to a decline in campus climate and academic performance (Solorzano, Ceja and Tara Yosso 2000).

Furthermore, in a study of 36 Black male students at selective (predominantly White) four-year institutions, Smith et al. (2007) investigated factors surrounding the significant

under-representation of Black students. These students were subjected to a Black “misandric” environment (anti-Black stereotyping and marginality). The students persisted at almost the same rate as their White counterparts, but with greater daily struggles. These racial microaggressions continued regularly, and affected the mental and physiological health (similar to the symptoms of racial battle fatigue) and academic achievement of the Black male students.

Because Black college students constitute in general a disproportionately underrepresented racial minority, and because they faced racial microaggressions on a regular basis, Smith et al. (2007) proved that they experienced disproportionately lower chances of matriculation (if transferring from a community college) and attainment of a baccalaureate degree. The lifetime earnings for Blacks therefore are lower, sickness indicators are higher and life spans are shorter than for Whites.

Even though community colleges are specifically designed to address issues of equality in education, there is a seeming contradiction between their policies and learning outcomes. For example, many of the policies that govern the delivery of education are overtly sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations (open admission, for example), yet students from these vulnerable populations do not thrive in equal percentages to community college students from dominant demographics. Why? If this contradiction continues, so will educational inequality by race, and any other demographic marker of difference, such as class, age, or gender.

Mechanisms that Affect Educational Outcomes

This research focuses on two types of educational access necessary for students of any race to achieve equal educational outcomes. These two types of access are *system access* and *process access*. This section contains a brief definition of each type of access and an introductory discussion regarding mechanisms that curtail system and process access from being equally available to Black and White students. Chapter 2 comprehensively reviews the literature regarding these two types of educational access.

System access refers to individual students gaining fair and equal entry into systems of higher education. Fair and equal access means that it is reasonable to expect entry into a wide variety of systems of higher education, not just those with open admissions policies. System access can be accomplished via probationary means, or other accommodating aspects of the admissions process, that enable the underprepared student to enter a wide variety of private colleges and public universities, regardless race, class, gender, or sexuality.

Process access refers to the student accessing and taking advantage of opportunities for learning once inside the college. If all students are given, and perceive that they are being given, equal opportunity to participate in the processes of learning and student life regardless of race, class, gender, or sexuality, then the educational institution can be judged as providing educational equity, or process access, to all students.

It is important to acknowledge that process access includes understanding that it is not enough to get in the door of an educational institution: Students also must have equal access and the perception of equal access to learning once enrolled in the institution. Process access equity means that enrolling at the same college and in the same college courses results

in a situation where all students (regardless of race or any other ascribed characteristic) have the same opportunity to experience the same education.

Mechanisms that Curtail System Access

Because of the history of slavery and segregation of African Americans within the United States, Blacks have historically struggled to gain equal access to and equal benefits from American educational institutions. 1954's *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* is widely considered the turning point in overt state policy concerning equal access to educational institutions for Blacks. Since this landmark decision, Blacks have gained much greater access to all levels of education, and the numbers of Blacks enrolled at predominantly White institutions have increased dramatically. The majority of Black students enrolled in post-secondary education today have attended predominantly White institutions (Adams 2005). This increase is widely considered encouraging and is promoted as a sign of equalizing educational opportunities.

With the passage of *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*, overt federal, state, and local policy shifted in the direction of equality and integration. In attempts to maintain the status quo of White elite dominance, however, covert and indirect mechanisms continued and helped maintain unequal access to quality education by race. Examples of these mechanisms included a sustained reliance on local tax bases as a primary source for public school funding, and ongoing resistance to re-drawing local school district boundaries (Barnhouse Walters 2001). These state policies provided opportunities for threatened elites (Whites) to activate their private resources to evade the intent of state educational policies. Such actions by elite Whites, as suburban white flight and the use of Charter and other

private school options, define ways in which they continued the legacies of segregationist state policies that pre-date *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*.

These indirect mechanisms maintain educational racial inequality by affecting local tax bases on class size and school resources, and correlate strongly with schools populated by disproportionately high percentages of minority and impoverished students. This is the link between socio-demographic diversity and de facto tracking (Barnhouse Walters, 2001; Lucas and Barends 2002). Indeed, Kozol (1991), in *Savage Inequality*, provides a detailed account of how local tax difference and district boundaries result in a vast difference in quality of education and lower access to systems of higher education by race, poverty, and urbanism.

Disproportionate underfunding and large class size are often cited motivators for economically-advantaged parents (disproportionately White) who opt for school choice programs and also enroll their children in better funded school options (Sikkink and Emerson 2008). When this happens, the school system that is left behind serves an even more concentrated group of disproportionately economically disadvantaged racial minorities. An underfunded secondary school system is correlated with producing graduates least prepared to enroll and succeed in college, and least likely to achieve a baccalaureate degree (Wassmer et al. 2004).

The community college, with its open admission criteria, is specifically designed to accommodate this population by allowing even the least prepared student to enroll. Some studies have found (Anderson et al. 2006), however, that underprepared college students are at a much higher risk for dropping out and failing to matriculate to four-year institutions. These “least prepared” students are often tracked into (or “cooled out” in) terminal

vocational-technical degree/certificate programs, instead of the Associate's degree track (the common transfer route to a four-year college).

Issues of system access may no longer rest on overt segregation efforts, but other indirect or covert mechanisms bar or impede student access to systems of higher education. Because the community college is the equal access point of entry for higher education, and since there is a wide degree of difference in preparedness of students entering this system by race and SES, it is crucial that community colleges be aware of the unequal standing of students, and therefore strive to equalize opportunities for everyone. Community colleges need to take special care to assess the potential of all incoming students, and to provide curriculum/programs specifically aimed at redressing these covert mechanisms. This type of transformation in perspective and policy would improve student access to equal education at the Kindergarten through twelfth grade (K–12) levels, and by extension the baccalaureate level.

Mechanisms that Curtail Process Access

There is a difference between gaining access to systems of learning (system access) and gaining access to the learning itself. Process access is concerned with students gaining access to learning within educational institutions. Specific mechanisms that can curtail process access for Black students in predominantly White institutions include *cultural hegemony*, use of a *dominant, colorblind curriculum*, the *perceptions Black students have of White faculty members* and the *Whiteness of the college*.

Cultural hegemony refers to the domination of subordinate groups through the indoctrination of everyday beliefs, practices and consciousness by the dominant class. The everyday operation of such institutions as schools, includes the indoctrination of a

consciousness that benefits the dominant group (White elites) by covertly training students to be good workers and productive citizens for the capitalist class. This process is illustrated in the practice of tracking students into career paths that disproportionately place minority and poor youth into low-wage jobs (Anderson et al. 2006; Dowd 2007; Lucas and Barends 2002).

Dominant, colorblind curriculum is characterized by the presence of learning content most consistent with the beliefs and values of those in power. It reflects pedagogy and curriculum determined by decision-makers in the institution of education to be most appropriate and necessary for students to learn. "Colorblindness" in the discourse[10] of race and education refers to the belief that if racial differences are not mentioned and if people of all races are believed to be equal, then the differences cease to exist. Dominant curriculum often goes hand-in-hand with the concept of colorblindness. Colorblindness, embedded in dominant curriculum, ignores and perpetuates inequalities based on race by dismissing differences and saying they do not exist (Adams 2005; Bonilla-Silva 2002).

The *perception Black students have of White faculty members* affects students' learning experiences. Race is a visible marker of difference and Black students may interpret Black faculty to be racially conscious and White faculty to be colorblind or biased. According to Brown and Dobbins (2004) and Tatum (1997), traditional aged Black college students are often at a stage of racial identity development of high awareness of racial differences and are inclined to feel more comfortable and open to learning in classroom environments where the teacher and student are of the same race.

Educational institutions are considered to be *"White"* when they have a culture of Whiteness via cultural hegemony and White/dominant colorblind curriculum. They are also considered *"White institutions"* when White people are overrepresented in leadership roles

throughout all levels—whether they are administration, faculty, staff, or students. The majority of Black college students attend predominantly White institutions. Because these institutions are disproportionately staffed and administered by Whites, and have cultures, practices, and policies that are racialized, Black students are generally situated within a "White framework" in colleges. Ultimately, the Whiteness of the community college is no exception from other "mainstream" postsecondary educational institutions.

This Whiteness in the community college system seems particularly poignant because it defies the original intent of equal access to education for all citizens. The original assumption under which the community college system was formed was that all citizens, regardless of ascribed or achieved status, would have equal access to postsecondary education. Equal access was assumed to follow students through the doors of the institution and throughout their educational experiences. The effect of community colleges as "White institutions" on students of color was not anticipated nor addressed in the development of the community college system; therefore, a contradiction exists between the founding principles of egalitarianism and democracy of community colleges and the framework in which they operate as predominantly White institutions.

Instituting a college culture of "colorblindness" is one common, albeit erroneous, way to neutralize this contradiction. The implicit rationale seems to say that if predominantly White institutions operate from a colorblind position then there is no need for (nor existence of) social justice or racially-conscious pedagogy within the college curriculum or culture. Colorblindness denies the existence of a racial hierarchy and, by default, supports the existence of both a White and dominant curriculum and a broader college culture. The result is a situation antithetical to the spirit of community colleges: Blacks and other

underrepresented groups become alienated from the processes of learning. Infusing predominantly White institutions with racially-conscious pedagogy and curriculum, and providing racially-matched instructors and staff/administration with Black students, are possible ways community colleges can create equity in process access.

Differences Between System Access and Process Access

System and process access refer to different points of access within the educational system. In order to be formally educated, students must not only get in the door of educational institutions, but also access the learning within the system. Both types of access are equally important, and are dependent on the other. For example, system access is necessary because, without entry into the educational system, process access is not possible. Similarly, process access is important and dependent on system access because, even if there is access to the system, the education of students will not happen without process access.

Even though both system and process access can be argued to have macro and micro mechanisms working to preclude or allow student access, system access involves more structural-level mechanisms and process access more inter/intra individual-level mechanisms. For example, education in the United States is institutionalized, within which various school systems span pre-kindergarten through graduate school. In order to have access to these systems, the institution itself must be structured in such a way as to allow this access—and this is where *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* is so important. Regardless of how individuals or small groups of people felt about segregated education, without the structural shift the case caused in 1954, Blacks would not have been allowed access to previously segregated schools.

Additionally, mechanisms that inhibit or encourage system access are generally more external to the educational system than those related to process access. While it was ultimately the legal institution that allowed equal system access to Blacks via the *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, it continues, paradoxically, to be the legal institution or the state that mobilizes mechanisms affecting equal access. Specifically, contemporary mechanisms such as the effects of local tax bases on class size, school resources, and the correlations of these mechanisms to schools with disproportionately high percentages of minorities, impoverishment, and low access rates to post-secondary education.

Affirmative Action is another example of a mechanism external to the educational system that continues to affect system access. The importance of Affirmative Action is that it is a state mechanism (just like unequal funding of local school districts), but it is also often used in challenging and correcting the covert ways in which the state perpetuates unequal system access. In such cases as the Michigan Affirmative Action case *Grutter v. Bollinger*[11], where a desegregated educational system still barred equal system access, external workings of political/legal institutions were activated to open these points of system access. Affirmative action gets students in the doors of higher education, which—importantly—allows access to the four-year degree, where life indicators, such as health, longevity, and lifetime earnings start to reach racial parity.

System access being granted, however, does not necessarily guarantee equality of learning within the school. Process access rests more heavily on micro-level processes within the school system. Because process access is dependent on inter/intra individual interactions within schools, and reflective of experiences, perspectives, and biases brought by individuals into the school environment, the degree of openness and accessibility of the processes of

learning within different schools are often school-specific. These differences result in great variance in atmosphere, retention, graduation, and ease of navigation of the processes of learning by school.

Rectifying issues of process access is not generally as direct a prospect as addressing issues of system access. Affirmative Action and the *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* decisions are relatively straightforward prescriptions to system access inequalities. Instituting a race-conscious culture within a college to rectify issues of process access depends on heightening awareness of race-related barriers to process access on individual and collective levels, which rest, at least in part, on internal shifts in beliefs, attitudes, and motivations of all participants of the system.

How System Access and Process Access Are Interrelated

System access and process access are generally conceptualized as two separate but linked mechanisms which privilege some populations over others. In reality, system and process access are related and mutually-reinforcing.

Traditionally, the concept of structure has been used to describe the workings of a large entity or system in society that effects the organization of the members within the system. The connections between system and process access are the ways in which larger structures (post-secondary educational institutions) affect the students, administrators, faculty, and staff within the structures/institutions. How participants simultaneously alter the institution also needs to be revealed. To conceptualize this mutual reinforcement, a new understanding of the malleability of the structure and the effects of the efforts of participants within the structure is needed.

Such structures as educational institutions are not static, but influenced by actors from within (Sewell 1992). Therefore, there is a malleability of structures depending on the type of agency expressed by the students and college employees, and the openness of the college culture to such agentic expressions (Sewell 1992; Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1984). In this view, structures are open to the influence of the agency of the social actors within the structure, while at the same time the actors are influenced by the nature of the structure. Because there is interrelatedness between the structure and the people within the structure, any reproduction of the structure is in some way reflective of the human practices within the structure. Likewise, the human practices are influenced by the structure. "[Therefore], human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact *presuppose* each other" (Sewell 1992:4, emphasis in original).

Certainly, marginalized students cannot simply decide that they are tired of barriers to the process of learning within a college (such as being excluded from class discussions due to the gap between valid [White] knowledge and their [Black] standpoint/view), stand up in the classroom to protest, and change and equalize the gap. The duality of structure rests on asymmetries of power within the structures and in the varying quantities of resources, and abilities to activate these resources that are held by actors within the system. It is within the collectives of "knowledgeable" Black students who have access to, and are capable of mobilizing agency recognized as being legitimate by other "knowledgeable actors", that the duality lays.

Gaining access to a post-secondary educational system means that students are able to get in the door of the college system. However, the ability of a student to access the learning within that system depends on the resources of the student and also how capable the student

is in mobilizing their resources. Gaining process access means that the learning within such systems is open and available to all students. Learning is a collective entity, comprised of matrices of interaction, just like the structure of the system. How open or closed the system is at either system or process access point is reflective of the human agency on all levels and of all structures. These accesses presuppose each other.

Contributions of this Research

Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education focused on equal rights to system access and since its passage social science research has focused on 1) uncovering mechanisms that promote or impede racial integration in the educational institution and 2) the consequences of an integrated school system. We know, for example, that "attending a Black segregated school continues to have a negative influence on achievement, (whereas) attending a White segregated school, in contrast, positively shapes average test performance" (Roscigno 1998:1,051). Additionally, research indicates that integrated (racially-diverse) schools "promote learning, increase understanding of racial groups, reduce racism, and promote positive social relationships among Blacks and Whites" (Hallinan 2001:64). Given these findings, it might be logical to conclude that educational equality is fundamentally achieved by ensuring equal access to systems of higher education.

Even when equal access is guaranteed, however, the Black/White achievement gap persists. As discussed previously, getting into the system of education can be quite different from accessing the process of learning once inside the institution. If all races are afforded equal entry into institutions of higher education and racial disparities persist in educational achievement (this achievement gap is most importantly noted in the attainment of a

baccalaureate degree), then additional mechanisms within the process of learning must be at play. It is the latter issue that this current research addresses. More specifically, I focus on specific mechanisms, as identified via the perspectives of Black students that relate to this issue of process access that inhibits or facilitates equal education by race.

It is especially important to have an understanding of Black students' experiences at the community college because it is the most probable entry point for students from underrepresented groups. Because the community college was developed as a gateway to higher education for everyone, it is a valuable research site to capture the perspectives of Blacks from a broader cross-section of demographic characteristics than perspectives of Blacks who attend selective four-year institutions.

Gaining an understanding of the workings of an educational system from the perspective of its marginalized participants is valuable. This understanding is valuable because, to a significant degree, issues of process access are about the perceptions of inclusion and opportunity felt more fully by marginalized groups. An understanding of these perceptions is needed in order to illuminate barriers and/or points of access to these processes.

In summary, this research attempts to shed new understanding on the persistence of the Black/White achievement gap in higher education. By using the voices of Black students within the community college setting as the gateway to higher education, previously unaddressed mechanisms that inhibit Black students from equal process access are examined. This focus provides a unique vantage point, and augments the often colorblind (White) voice traditionally found in the research on race and higher education. Being situated in a community college and privileging marginalized voices enables this research to fill an

important gap in current understandings of race, education, and hidden mechanisms of inequality.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide an overview of previous research on race and education. Additionally, I will further develop the concepts of system access and process access and highlight limitations of research on system access and process access that this research seeks to address.

Brief Overview of Research on Race and Education

The Black/White gap in educational achievement has long been a concern for sociologists. Because education is a means of social mobility, racial disparity in educational attainment contributes to racial inequality in lifetime earnings, wealth accumulation, and other such quality of life indicators as health and longevity. Historically, the Black/White racial gap has been found to be more resistant to change than gaps in education between other subordinate/dominant groups. A national tradition of slavery, segregation and subordination has made these differences in educational attainment particularly difficult to overcome.

Much of the earlier research on race and higher education focused on assumed biological differences between Blacks and Whites. For example, the theory of biological determinism originally attempted to explain discrepancies between Black and White educational outcomes. This theory was popular at the beginning of the 20th century, and then again in the 1970s with the publication of *The Bell Curve*, which stated that the reason for the educational gap was innate differences in intellectual abilities between Blacks and Whites (Jacobs 1999).

Other research has focused on inadequacies in Black families, and cultural differences between Blacks and Whites to explain differences in educational attainment. For example, the Coleman (1966) and the Moynihan (1965) reports drew attention to the effect of family systems on educational attainment and were widely interpreted to question the functionality of Black family structures. By the late 1970s, critics of these studies began to draw attention to the fact that "different family structures predominate at different class and income levels" (Hallinan 2001:55). This focus suggested that differences between Blacks and Whites were not so much differences in family structures, but due more to Blacks' response to different social and economic pressures.

More recent research has begun to shift away from focusing on educational outcomes and how outcomes might vary by race to uncovering the mechanisms at play within educational environments as they are experienced differently by race. An example of this shift includes Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital theory, which links culture, race, and intergenerational socioeconomic status (SES). Cultural capital is a general point of view, operating framework or disposition that is passed from one generation to the next in the form of a resource that helps social classes convey intergenerational advantage. Students who come from class-advantaged families, and who have been raised with a sense of entitlement, frequently operate from a position of privilege, which helps them navigate such institutions as the educational institution. Because of the link between socio-economic-status and race, Blacks are more likely than Whites to have low socio-economic-status. Black students are less likely than White students to be imbued with this type of class advantage and have, therefore, less cultural capital (Hallinan 2001; Lareau 2003).

Additionally, Ferguson (2001) highlighted the effects of institutional structures on different youth within schools. According to her, not only did Black youths more often than White youths come to school with an economic disadvantage, they came with a race disadvantage. Furthermore, mechanisms within educational institutions, such as punishment procedures, disproportionately affected Black youth. She found these types of procedures to be colorblind, therefore, by default, White[13]. Such research as Hallinan (2001), Lareau (2003) and Ferguson (2001) illustrates an important shift from outcomes-based research to mechanisms-based research, and brings into sharper focus mechanisms that effect equal access to *equal quality* of education.

Understanding the variety of factors that affect student access to and success in post-secondary education is important because post-secondary education is widely believed to be a pathway to social and economic mobility, equally accessible to all students. However, this is a faulty belief due to myriad factors, including historical and contemporary race-based practices that contribute to unequal system and process access.

Brief Discussion of System Access

Equal access to educational institutions and equal access to learning once inside the institution are two necessary conditions for educational equality. The concept of system access revolves around the first condition of educational equality, the process of "getting in the door" of an educational system.

System access refers to the ability to enter a wide variety of private colleges and public universities regardless of race, class, gender, or sexuality. Access to the same educational institutions is important because it is fundamental to understanding racial parity

of life outcomes. Since *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* in 1954 made access to equal education in the public sector law, extensive research has investigated whether or not this law, which mandated equal access to education, actually resulted in equal access for Blacks and Whites in communities across the United States.

Barnhouse Walters (2001) argued that the intent of *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* has not come to fruition. She concluded that major barriers to equal system access include the state (that is, federal and state governments) themselves and elite groups that influence the state's actions. For example, unequal access to quality educational institutions by race is conditioned in large part by the historic reliance on local taxes to fund local schools (as dictated by the State), and results in gross economic inequalities in school districts. These inequalities are mirrored in the economic segregation of neighborhoods. The State also creates and maintains school district boundaries that keep low-income students in low-income neighborhoods attending poorly-funded and inadequate schools. Kozol (1991) illustrated in his book *Savage Inequalities* the deleterious effects of attending these types of schools on children's ability to access systems of higher education once completing this poorly-funded and segregated educational (K–12) system. Kozol found that equal access to quality primary and secondary systems was repeatedly and directly related to equal system access to post secondary educational systems.

Barnhouse Walter's (2001) analysis of educational inequality focused not only on the effects of unfair state policy, but also on mechanisms influencing state policy. Behind the dictates of the state are forces circumventing any equity and egalitarianism that may be intended in state policy. For example, people who have educational advantage may be threatened by the State's efforts to equalize access to quality education. These elite groups

may mobilize their private resources in an effort to constrain or circumvent state policy intended to equalize access to education. In this way, they maintain their advantage by perpetuating unequal access to quality education. Suburbanization is one example of how Whites activate private resources to leave poorly-funded and under-performing districts. This "White flight" causes residential segregation, and results in de facto segregation.

In addition to educational systems being divided economically, racial division, as a consequence of residential segregation, is also present in education. According to Massey and Denton (1993), a contemporary consequence of slavery is continuing de facto segregation (residential, and therefore educational). In *American Apartheid*, they state that because Black and White families live in economically-segregated neighborhoods, the same amount of money does not equate to the same quality of education in these neighborhoods. Due to the disproportionately low funding of schools in Black neighborhoods, Black families of relatively higher income levels within these underfunded areas are not able to see any economic advantage in the schools. This is the same phenomenon that led Massey and Denton to conclude that "it is a small wonder then, that controlling for income in no way erases the large racial gap in SAT scores" (1993:153).

Massey and Denton (1993) are consistent with Barnhouse Walters (2001) in their perspective on the effects of continuing de facto segregation. They both state that racial inequality in education is primarily caused by state mechanisms that continue to support the drawing of school district boundaries around urban areas with high concentrations of poverty, lack of economic viability, and low tax revenue. Consequently, inadequate funds for local schools, poor school performance, and relatively low numbers of students who continue on to systems of higher education result.

In addition to state mechanisms that cause residential segregation and leave disproportionately high numbers of Blacks in poorly-funded and inadequate K–12 systems, continuing challenges to such federal equalizing policies as Affirmative Action inhibit equal access to educational systems. In cases where Affirmative Action has been upheld (that is, Michigan case[14] in 2003), equal system access was granted. In cases where Affirmative Action has been struck down (that is, California, *Proposition 209*, which outlawed AA in admissions to public institutions), there has been and is occurring a precipitous decline in populations of Blacks and other students of color at colleges and universities (Karen 2002). Racial inequality in system access, therefore, continues to today.

A Discussion of Process Access

As defined in Chapter 1, *process access* refers to equal participation in the processes of learning and student life regardless of race, class, gender, or sexuality. Issues of process access acknowledge that it is not enough to get in the door of an educational institution: Students must have equal access to the learning once within the institution. Process access means that enrolling at the same college and in the same college courses results in all students (regardless of race or any other ascribed characteristic) receiving the same education and experience.

A full understanding of the role of higher education in life opportunities and chances of Blacks must be based on the understanding that there is a distinction "between the abstract, symbolic importance of the right to *access* education and the pragmatic view of the ability to take advantage of that right as well as the practical utility of doing so" (Barnhouse Walters 1999:268). Chapter 1 briefly discusses how mechanisms internal to the structure of

the college and to the individuals within the college system may curtail process access for Black students in predominantly White institutions. These mechanisms include the existence of cultural hegemony within the institutional system, use of dominant curriculum and state of colorblindness, faculty bias, and White teacher framework as perceived by the student. These mechanisms can be categorized in two ways: 1) How the learning of Black students is affected by the existing institutional structure and culture, and 2) how Black students exercise agency and cultural production within the college institutional structure in order to access processes of learning.

An understanding of this two-fold nature of process access necessitates an examination of how the structure of the college affects the learning experiences of Black students via conditions of cultural hegemony, White curriculum, colorblindness, faculty bias, and White framework. Additionally, it necessitates an examination of the ability of Black students to mobilize their culture and agency within the existing structure, and how this mobilization affects their ability to access the processes of learning. The two main points here are, predominantly White educational systems are biased, and also that students are agents, and as such, work to navigate the system to achieve their educational goals.

Effect of White Institutional Structure/Culture on the Process Access of Black Students

Because prevailing common schooling policies (which stem from early 19th century educational mandates) governing education reflected dominant White culture, these institutions were commonly referred to as “White institutions”. Additionally, because these institutions were disproportionately staffed and administered by Whites, and have racialized cultures, practices, and policies, schools situated students generally within a “White

framework". Black schools were in existence, but were underfunded, segregated, and in some instances ignored by the state as educational institutions.

It is arguable that segregated White institutions provided Whites with a superior quality of education (in part, due to disproportionate access to resources), and therefore allowed the provision of these resources exclusively to White students. Others would qualify such an argument by highlighting the value of liberatory education provided to Blacks in segregated schools. According to bell hooks (1994), the experience of learning in a segregated black school was a fundamentally political act, experienced as revolutionary, because the teaching that occurred in these schools was rooted in antiracist struggles. All of the teachers from whom hooks learned in segregated schools were Black, and she states learning, "early on in life that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (2).

Both of these views of segregated education highlight the distinction between system access and process access, and reveal that segregated schools offered both types of access. In particular, Black segregated schools provided access to a system of education to Black students, and also to process access via a structure and culture within the Black school, open to and consistent with the culture of Black students. Alternatively, while integrated schools offered access to the system of education, integrated schools did not offer access to culturally relevant and experiential learning, due to White cultural hegemony and dominant (White) curriculum—which made learning exclusively normative for White students and non-normative for Black students. The effect of a White institutional structure and culture on process access was, and still is, an institutional push to assimilate Black students to a White

world, as well as a devaluation of the Black race and culture, and ultimately results in an alienation from the processes of learning.

Since desegregation, much of the research on race and education has focused on the effect of Black students on White collegiate institutions and on the effect of attending predominantly White institutions on Black students. It is logical to conclude that the presence of Black students on a White campus shifts the climate of the campus in some ways. However, because this shift is usually small-scale, its effects on the policies and curriculum of the White structure are limited.

If this is the case, then what are the consequences of attending predominantly White institutions for Black students? Augmenting hooks' findings, Adams (2005) states that these students are seldom exposed to the content of the canon of Black scholarship, which makes it difficult for Blacks to see themselves in the curriculum. The critical absence of voices from the Black canon in predominantly White institutions of higher education (as a result of desegregation) is significant because it creates an intellectually sterile learning environment for Blacks and commonly results in the internalization of marginalized status by Black students, subsequently resulting in lower graduation and "achievement" rates.

While some colleges have developed courses in diversity to address the preponderance or exclusiveness of White curriculum, the content of these courses is often cursory in its examination of historical and current conditions of exploitation and lacking in the application of critical perspective. Courses attempting to address issues of race at predominantly White institutions also vary their focus from afro-centric to multiculturalist perspectives, and often remain ill-defined as to which philosophical orientation they come from (Binder 1999). Whether this lack of definition or content is due to the ignorance of

White teacher frameworks or unwillingness of faculty and/or administration to address issues of race at predominantly White colleges, the effect of marginalizing students of color is the same.

This ignorance of afro-centric and multiculturalist curriculum illustrates the invisibility of Whiteness. If Whiteness is normative in a school, then being White in a White institution makes race invisible to those who are developing and implementing the structures within which learning is to occur, and also to White students within that institution. Being Black in a White institution is to be an "other", the one who is counter-normative, who is measured against the norm of being White physically and culturally, and found lacking. For Whites, to whom Whiteness is an invisible norm; Whiteness is never perceived to be present or to have any consequence. However, once Whiteness is made visible to Whites, the crucial ways in which Whiteness privileges Whites, by being an ascribed status of power, become evident (Apple 1993). For Black students, Whiteness is always there, always visible, foreign, and not entirely accessible—thus, preventing full access to the processes of learning within the White institution. This point can be understood as part of Barnhouse Walters' (1999) argument that while it is one thing to get in the door of the institution, it is quite another for Blacks and other students who are "non-White" to be able to take advantage of that access.

An academic culture of colorblindness in which Whiteness is invisible creates a kind of "fish-out-of-water" experience for Blacks. Colorblindness upholds and legitimates the White power structure on campuses, effectively silences Black voices and marginalizes Black knowledge and consciousness. bell hooks (1989) exposes much of this kind of "fish-out-of-water" experience in her discussions of being a Black female graduate student in an English department at a White graduate school. She proposes that the psychological and

physical toll of being forced into the literature of Whites with covert and overt disregard to the issues of race can be isolating at best—and permanently scarring at worst.

Additionally, “Black students [who] are seldom exposed to scholarly work related to the Black experience must construct their young adult racial identities from the raw and flawed racial stereotypes perpetuated in the media and popular culture” (Adams 2005:285). This conflict can result in the false understanding that Blacks have nothing or very little to contribute to, or in common with, the canon of knowledge. Black students may have difficulty relating to the content of courses, and become bored, disconnected, or even alienated within these White institutions. It is unsurprising, therefore, that retention and graduation rates remain disproportionately lower for Black students than for Whites.

The wider institutional culture of the college can also be alienating. If the wider institutional culture (that is, administrators and decision-makers in the college, campus housing, student services and activities office, and so on) is perceived as “White”, Black students feel marginalized unless the students and institutional culture find ways to make spaces of belonging. According to Brower and Ketterhagen (2004), Black students who find themselves a numeric and racial minority on White campuses tend to band together in small, racially homogeneous and close-knit groups. Unless the wider institutional culture makes an effort via race-conscious initiatives in the classroom, and more generally in the larger campus environment, to connect these groups to wider campus resources and opportunities, these groups will be dysfunctional to its members, and fail to produce a “belonging-within-alienation” experience.

Aspects of institutional culture extend outside the classroom in predominantly White institutions, as well. This effect can be reflected in a variety of ways, such as the food

included in meal plans, available student activity choices, and housing arrangements, which are most generally steeped in Whiteness, ignoring racial variations and practices. Out of a desire to belong, students may feel they need to "code switch": To double their cultural and racial identity in order to be viewed as legitimate college students and access the same social capital U.S. White students automatically have (Apple 2006). This incongruence between the culture of many Black students and the White institutional culture they are confronted with is cloaked in an invisible veneer of Whiteness, and is yet another way that cultural and structural processes at White colleges impede Black students from equal access to educational processes.

In addition to alienation from the curriculum and the culture within the institution due to its Whiteness, other institutional practices inhibit Black student access to processes of learning. These practices include particular discourses and policies of exclusion found overtly and covertly at the community college. Overtly touting community colleges' democratic access to all students via class-based rhetoric (inexpensive tuition, open enrollment, small class sizes, and remedial curriculum) pushes a message of class-based individualism by stating the community college is the place where anyone can be successful. This rhetoric is yet another part of the institutional structure that covertly puts an invisible veneer on issues of race and that undergirds the White cultural hegemony in the institution. This rhetoric permits the college to ignore any policy or practice within its educational framework that alienates or inhibits access to the processes of learning by race.

In summary, the effects of a White institutional structure/culture on the process access of Black students include use of a dominant curriculum, White teacher framework, and perceived faculty bias—which results in alienating Black students from the processes of

learning within the classroom. Additionally, a White institutional culture, reflected in colorblind college polices and White student housing, services and activity departments' results in Black students having difficulty seeing themselves as belonging in any way to that campus culture. These practices also inhibit the formation of the type of racially homogenous membership groups that foster a "belonging-within-alienation" experience. Experiencing an environment void of familiar social cues and support puts pressure on these students to "code-switch" to dominant cultural practices, further alienating them from the educational institution. All of these practices undergird the rhetoric of class-based individualism, render issues of race invisible, perpetuate unequal process access, and create stereotypes regarding educational achievement by race.

How Black Students Affect Process Access by Exercising Agency and Cultural Production

This section examines the ways in which Black students affect the structure of the institution, and therefore their access to the processes of learning. For this discussion, structure needs to be conceptualized as influencing, but also open to, the efficacy of human action; otherwise known as agency (Bandura 2001). This definition of structure takes into consideration the mutually reinforcing nature of the actions of individuals and the structure of the educational institution. Black students primarily affect process access at predominantly White educational institutions 1) by exercising agency and 2) by participating in non-normative cultural production.

Ferguson's 2001 study of Black students and their encounters with the systems of punishment within the public school system examined the dynamics surrounding agency and non-normative cultural production. These students were subjected to symbolic violence (that is, the idea that unfair social hierarchy is "natural" and therefore ignored) and

disproportionate punishment measures, such as detention. The students devised several resistance strategies within this structure of power which resulted in the formation of same-race groups that allowed for different expressions of racial identity, such as Black styles of dress and speech.

In Ferguson's study (2001), whenever marginalized Black students felt and acted as though they had the power to produce an effect within the school that they perceived as advantageous to them, they exercised their agency. Exercising agency in this study did not always mean acting against the dominant framework. Acting in accordance with dominant definitions of good student behavior may at times have been as advantageous to the student as contesting dominant definitions. Black students may have found themselves in situations where they shifted between "acting White" and "acting Black". This shifting was referred to as double consciousness (Du Bois 1989). Examples included sliding into Black linguistic derivations in the "punishment room" (that is, detention), or conversely, participating "appropriately" within the White confines of expected behavior in physical education class.

Double consciousness means that the identity of Blacks is part of the dominant educational system (as citizens) and at the same time being subordinated as minorities within the system (Du Bois, 1989). It is not simply that within White educational institutions Blacks internalize an identity of less-than; it is also that Black students can bring with them, and enact, an alternative Black identity as being resourceful, creative, and multi-faceted.

By refusing to accept the White school's definition of "good student", the marginalized Black students in Ferguson's (2001) study exercised their agency. Because of this ability, they often formed safe places of learning and cushioned themselves from the marginalizing effects of the White educational system. Ferguson's study highlighted the

processes by which individuals (in this case, Black male middle school students), negotiated their positions within the hierarchical structure of education in order to protect themselves and access processes of learning.

Activating a state of double consciousness can be stressful, but it can also be a mechanism that enables Blacks to access resources from the Black community which, in turn, may increase chances for educational success. However, Black females and males mobilize different mechanisms when accessing and using resources from the Black community. This dissimilarity may be one reason for the discrepancy in educational achievement rates between Black females and males[15]. Since a disproportionate number of Blacks access post-secondary education at the community college-level, understanding the gender difference in how Blacks mobilize resources from the Black community, and how that translates into an educational advantage for Black females at this entry point, is important.

Weis, in her 1985 qualitative study of an urban community college, found that 70 percent of the Black female students, as opposed to 30 percent of Black male students, reported being heads of households and financially responsible for one or more children. Her research indicated that the gender role of the Black female in the urban Black culture called for her to be strong and to take primary responsibility to make a “better life for her kids”. Additionally, since the majority of Black female students were responsible for children and were poor, they relied on a complex kin network of trading favors (childcare and transportation, which allowed them to attend class, for example). This network, although complex, provided tremendous support and served as the port of many resources necessary for the Black female students to succeed academically.

By accessing this network, the Black female students activated their agency, successfully transferring a non-normative (Black urban) cultural definition of "student" into the White college. Using this network insulated these Black students against the Whiteness of the college culture, enabling them to access more of the process of learning within the institution. Black males did not share in this gender role (culturally-defined as being primarily responsible for the improvement of their children's lives or the kin network). The difference in student realities according to gender affected student trajectories and motivation, as well as their use of resources available to help them navigate, graduate, and transfer to four-year institutions.

Weis's (1985) examination, much like Arnett Ferguson's (2001) study, illuminates the processes by which subordinate students (low-SES Black college females in Weis's study and Black high school males in Arnett Ferguson's) may work to redefine themselves and the dominant structure around them in order to avoid "failure". To navigate the educational system and at the same time retain a sense of racial identity, students have to engage in an "active project, not a set of foregone conclusions [which is a process of] accepting or rejecting, strengthening or undermining, the definitions and social situations within which they discover themselves" (Weis 1985:xii). These processes of culture production and enactment of agency are not simple, nor without conflict and contradiction. These processes require Black students to shift their interpretations and reactions to the White structure, but also shift their identity of themselves as Black students at White educational institutions.

Limitations in Research on Process Access

Much of the previous research on issues of process access in higher education is incomplete because it has focused almost exclusively on issues at the four-year level (i.e. effects of White classrooms/curriculum, perceived White teacher framework, and ability to navigate the White institutional structure). For example, when examining factors that increase the formation of same-race collectives and how these groups may affect student integration with overall processes of education, Adams (2005), McClure (2006), and Brower and Ketterhagen (2004) all used four-year college and university campuses as research sites. Additionally, research on the effects of colorblind discourse inside the classroom, and the difference in Black and White student perceptions of how White instructors view them, has been conducted on four-year campuses (Dobbins et al. 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2002; Lewis et al. 2000).

It is important to understand experiences Black students have accessing processes of learning at the four-year level, but since the community college is the most probable entry point for Black students, there is an even greater need to gain an understanding of their experiences at the two-year level (Karen 2002, Mason 1998). There are some indications that Black males face unique challenges, which are exacerbated at the community college level. For example, Flowers' (2006) research finds that Black males who attend four-year institutions report higher levels of social and academic integration than those attending two-year institutions. This finding may be due to the higher rate of participation in college sports and extracurricular activities at the four-year level as opposed to the limited offerings of these same activities at the two-year community college level. Similarly, Mason (1998) proposes that the experience of Black males is unique and more difficult at the community

college than at four-year institutions because of the greater chance that they will be “non-traditional” (either more than 24 years old, part-time enrollee, or living off campus), and therefore not as integrated into the college. The supportive culture for Black males appears to be somewhat tied to athletic opportunities that function latently as avenues for group collectivity and access to institutional support (tutoring, student integration, and so on)—avenues more common at four-year colleges (Littleton 2003).

Regardless of Black students’ ability to exercise agency and participate in non-normative cultural production within the community college, there continue to be situations where White teacher frameworks, the predominance of White-based curriculum, and the White administrative structure alienates Black students from educational experiences. If the community college is truly going to fulfill its original mission of providing locally available, post-secondary education equally to all citizens, then there needs to be greater understanding of how the learning of Black students is affected by the existing White institutional structure and culture, as well as how process access of Black students is affected by their ability to exercise agency and cultural production within the community college structure.

More generally, there is little that is known about the experiences students have at four-year or two-year educational institutions regarding influences on process access. What is needed is more research on the barriers to the process of learning, and ways in which these barriers are navigated, using a variety of research methods. The current literature includes mostly quantitative, but also some qualitative, studies. Quantitative data, for example, generally provides an overall sense of campus climate, which affects comfort levels and therefore integration of all students, but is limited in providing a deeper understanding of the effects of the race of the student respondent, or the effect of the whiteness of the institution

on the climate as perceived by Black students. Qualitative data on factors influencing process access at four-year institutions does exist, and provides more in-depth understandings of factors affecting student learning. Such studies, however, are not plentiful.

Research on issues of process access (quantitative or qualitative) at the community college is particularly scant. Despite the democratic underpinnings of community college mission statements, there is a remarkable lack of scholarly research on just how democratic these institutions are in allowing students of all colors to access the same education once inside the college doors. This dearth limits our understanding of the processes occurring in institutions that, in theory, are specifically designed to address racial disparities in educational access.

Specifically, research on student race relations and campus climate (elements of process access) seems to be missing. Data gathering at the community college level usually consists of in-house campus reports, which may include only one question related to process access on a questionnaire, or multiple questions on a school-administered questionnaire with little regard for reliability or validity scales. These studies vary in methodology: London (1978) and Weis (1985) conducted ethnographies; Person and Rosenbaum (2006) conducted surveys, and Clements (1997), Weissman, Bulakowski and Jumisko (1998), and Willett (2002) conducted several student focus groups. Due to the fragmentation of research methodology and lack of significant sample size, little comparative data remains available at the community college level.

What can be deduced from these studies is that the campus climate ratings are generally positive, but what that evaluation really means is still unknown. Due to lack of uniformity of the wording of the questions and variances in positive rating via methodology

(surveys have typically yielded more positive campus climate ratings than ethnographies), and also due to the predominance of White students who typically rate the racial and ethnic climate higher than do non-White students, it is unknown whether these positive ratings are due to perceptions, actual experiences, or racial attitudes of students.

There is only one known national study addressing process access focused on campus climate (one element of process access). In 1997, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) surveyed 1,450 community college presidents and administrators, of whom 360 responded (Kee 1999). One item on the questionnaire asked administrators and presidents to rate campus climate on a 5-point scale: Contentious to harmonious. “None rated their colleges with a score of 1 at the contentious pole of the scale; 21% of participants rated their colleges as harmonious with a score of 5; and 39% rated their colleges as 4, somewhat harmonious. Almost one third, 31%, selected the midpoint score of 3, a mix of conflict and harmony. Seven percent indicated a score of 2 for somewhat contentious campus climates” (Maxwell and Shammas 2007:4). Overall, a full 60 percent of community college administrators rated their campus climate as moderately or significantly harmonious.

Given the difficulties of a significant proportion of the student population who struggle to complete degree requirements, these statistics may represent bias or colorblindness in perception of the predominantly White administrators. The high campus climate rating may also illustrate the disjuncture between the status and agency of the predominantly White administration (the study respondents) and the underprivileged segments of the student population who were, disproportionately, minorities and poor. Missing from all of these considerations, however, is research that provides a wider

understanding of campus climate, and other indicators of process access from the student view—specifically from the view of students of color.

Also absent from the canon of research on racial inequality in higher education is a thorough examination of the factors that enable Black students to survive and/or thrive in predominantly White colleges. This gap has started to be addressed by research that has shifted focus from the traditional (and overly deterministic) view of the consequences of being subordinate within dominant institutions to uncovering mechanisms that allow Black students to retain racial identity and activate agency in order to succeed in White structures. Ferguson's (2001) study of Black males within a White secondary school is an excellent example of how racially subordinate students find ways to circumvent White structures. Since Black students create their own definitions of Blackness, they are able to maintain their racial identities and to persist in White educational settings. Findings such as these lead to productive conclusions about the status of these students. McClure (2006), for example, concludes that, "We must not only look at failures but also potential locations for success… Research in this area must provide evidence regarding how specific organizational contexts, particularly minority-serving organizations uniquely function to facilitate the success of minority students" (p. 1,037).

Given the increasing demand for higher education and the stagnation and/or decline in enrollment of four-year colleges and universities, community college enrollments continue to swell (Dowd 2007). Due to this increase in enrollment of students from across the socio-economic and racial continuum, the student population at most community colleges is becoming larger and more diverse. Community colleges are feeling pressure not only to give increasing numbers of students' access to the system of higher education, but also to provide

more expansive remedial programs and more successful transfer programs. In order for community colleges to offer equal educational experiences to a growing and increasingly diverse student body, more needs to be understood about the barriers Black students face because of White administrative structures of the community college, dominant pedagogy of the classroom, and other elements of student life.

How this Research Addresses Limitations in Research on Process Access

While system access is one element that affects the probability of educational achievement and associated life indicators, another element, not so heavily researched, is access to the processes of learning once inside educational systems. Since disproportionately large numbers of Black students attend community colleges as opposed to four-year colleges, this research, based at the community college level, is particularly situated to address these gaps in research on racial inequality in education.

This research contributes to current research by investigating and describing issues of process access from the standpoint[16] of the marginalized student. *First*, by using a mixed phenomenological and grounded theory approach to capture Black student voices, a unique perspective will be produced regarding how educational institutions *feel* to the student and how the student views, experiences, and reacts to the institution. Additionally, this combined methodological approach will provide insight regarding how the structure of the college connects with how Black students describe their access to learning on campus. The use of phenomenology and grounded theory extends previous research, which captured the voices of students (Ferguson 2001) via the ethnographic method, by allowing for capturing a deeper essence of what it means to be Black in a White educational institution.

Second, by shifting the site of the study from an integrated secondary public school (Ferguson 2001), or from four-year colleges (who have admission requirements that limit student access) to the community college, I extend the understanding of what it means to be Black in the most frequently accessed post-secondary educational institution. Because the community college, as a gateway institution, neutralizes the effect of system access barriers (entrance tests, prior educational achievement/attainment and, to a large degree, cost), it is the ideal place to situate research on process access barriers in higher education.

Demographic trends that help to illustrate the need for such research show the proportion of racial and ethnic minority students doubling in the community college from 15.6 percent to 30.3 percent between 1976 and 1996. These numbers are projected to increase in the subsequent 25 years (Kee 1999). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 42.3 percent of Blacks in higher education are enrolled in the community college system, along with 50 percent of Native Americans and 55.6 percent of the Hispanic enrollment (NCES 1999). Overall, the community college is the port of entry for 40 percent of all Black college students (Hamilton 2003).

Third, as previously discussed, parity of quality-of-life indicators for Blacks and Whites begin with the attainment of a baccalaureate degree, however, disproportionately large numbers of Blacks that begin at the two-year level are not reflected in numbers of Black students who transfer to the four-year level. For example, minorities constitute 25 percent of the student body at community colleges but only 18 percent of the student body in four-year colleges and universities (Anderson et al. 2006). In an effort to address this transfer gap, factors affecting minority student experiences and trajectories in the community college are gaining attention. Newer research has begun to shift toward process access,

uncovering the Black student experience once inside the community college to discern processes at work that inhibit or circumvent equal educational experience. By situating this research in an institution that is the primary port of entry into the world of post-secondary education for Blacks (the community college), understanding the mechanisms and processes that impede and enable the attainment of a college education by the majority of Blacks is greatly expanded.

Fourth, this research, located at a large Midwestern community college within a White community (which is also predominantly White in structure, student body, administration, faculty, and staff), extends previous research on Blacks within community colleges located in urban, and more diverse, environments. This project uncovers ways Black students maneuver the White college system within a community that lacks the resources of sheer numbers of Blacks and urban culture—as highlighted by previous research (Weis 1984).

In summary, this project seeks to understand the interplay between the White community college structure and the Black students as they navigate the system to access learning opportunities. This study fills a gap in the literature on race, education, and inequality not only because the research site is particularly germane to Blacks' access to higher education (the community college), but also because it furthers an in-depth understanding—from the perspective of Black students via the phenomenological and grounded theory methods—of the ways processes within the educational setting impede and/or facilitate educational attainment. Importantly, this focus departs from past research that tends to be overly deterministic when examining the effect of being subordinate in White institutions, and instead explores both the barriers to learning Black students face in White

educational institutions and the ways by which Black students maneuver the structure of a White college to succeed in gaining equal access to the processes of learning.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FOCUS AND RESEARCH METHOD PROCESS

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the mechanisms at play at a White community college that inhibit, and possibly facilitate, equitable educational experiences for Black students. This study addresses one central question: How do Black students perceive and describe their experience of being Black at a White community college?

Qualitative research is commonly inductive in approach and intends to uncover how individuals experience, interpret, and understand the world around them. Theorists who use qualitative methods of data collection and analysis embrace the assumption that the world is socially constructed and believe they can enter the world of the respondents in order to gain an understanding of their lived experiences. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to use a holistic rather than a reductionist approach to understanding people's experiences (Merriam et al. 2002). In contrast, quantitative approaches usually involve deductive reasoning and statistical measurement of a person's experience.

This study employs inductive methods of data collection and analysis in order to explore the meanings and interpretations of the experiences Black students have at a predominantly White community college. My goal is to capture the essence of what it means to be Black at a White educational institution. Therefore, this study required methods specifically designed to capture all aspects, features, perceptions, interpretations and descriptions of the life of a Black student in a White institution. In addition, inductive methods allow me as the researcher to discern patterns across individuals.

To accomplish these research goals, I draw up both phenomenology and grounded theory to inform my research. Phenomenology informed my data collection in brief, because it is specifically structured to explore a central phenomenon by capturing the essence of the lived experiences of the respondents: it is therefore best suited for gathering data for this study (Cresswell 1998). Grounded theory also informed my data analysis. Grounded theory allows for applying the meaning respondents made of their experiences to the literature on race and education, and also for identifying patterns and "groupness" in their descriptions of their lived experiences. This methodology enabled me to develop conclusions regarding systematic barriers to learning and ways in which Black students navigate these barriers in a predominantly White institution.

In this chapter, I further develop the methodological basis, or underpinnings of this research. More specific, I discuss in more detail the strengths and weaknesses of phenomenology and grounded theory as research methods. I then present data collection, data analysis, research site, research respondents, study timeline, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and rigor, and limitations of the study itself.

Theoretical Research Focus: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Four themes describe the general tenets of CRT: First, CRT is a form of oppositional scholarship and, as such, challenges the norms of White perspectives and structures both of which have not only played out historically but also are recreated today through everyday interaction within institutions (such as schools). Second, colorblind efforts toward racial equality (that is, statements that color of skin is no longer important) are assumed to be limited in their effectiveness. At best such efforts may reduce some incidences of individual

racism, but do not address historical and structural inequalities between races. Third, CRT suggests that historical/structural inequalities can only be addressed via the process of interest convergence (where anti-racist reforms serve interests of White elites as well as the people of color), not via any other process of individual action, collective action, or call for reform from people of color. Fourth, CRT also suggests that people of color have experiences that differ from normative White experiences and, therefore, have perspectives and viewpoints that are likely to be different from mainstream or dominant narratives. In order to achieve full and inclusive academic—as well as everyday—discourse, it is imperative that people of all races advance their own narratives via traditional and non-traditional means, such as storytelling and other heuristic modalities (Su 2007).

Because critical race theory uses storytelling and narratives as valid and important ways of understanding the experiences of people of color, it fits very well with the qualitative methods of phenomenology and grounded theory. Phenomenology captures the unfiltered voice and experience of each participant and grounded theory examines these narratives to connect the lived experience of the respondents to the processes that structure these experiences. The use of these methods allows this research to challenge existing socio-historical/legal constructions of race and race relations by presenting the voices of the respondents in an unfiltered way, thus facilitating such advancement of traditionally marginalized narratives. Combining the strengths of both methodologies helps illuminate the practice of institutional racism as it is experienced among groups within the existing college processes.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Racial Legacies in the United States

Because historical racism manifests itself in contemporary social structures, attaining equality in education requires that institutionalized racism (including racialization via symbols and language) be illuminated and eradicated. A review of racial legacies in the Unites States illustrates how historical patterns of race relations continue to influence the everyday experiences of Blacks (and other people of color) in contemporary educational institutions.

CRT proposes that due to an historical relationship of internal colonialism, Blacks with slave ancestry (and to a degree those without it, due to general social perceptions and definitions of Blackness) participate in educational institutions from a racialized position (Parker 1998; Ladson-Billings 1998). Because the meaning of Blackness is created within an institutionalized racist structure, inter-racial relationships created upon this meaning, within such structures privilege Whiteness over Blackness. This racial privilege also reflects economic privilege, because the wealth of Whites has historically been, and continues to be, predicated on the work and devaluation of Blacks.

Still necessary for elite Whites' economic gain, racial hierarchies, as well as cultural, political, and economic oppression of Blacks, continue. This process continues, however, without the trappings of overt colonial administration and legal segregation (Ladson-Billings 1998; 1995). Contemporary processes of oppression operate in covert ways, which include educational systems steeped in colorblind policy and the invisible privilege of Whiteness. These systemic processes of oppression result in Black students being distanced from knowledge and systems of learning within these institutions.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Racial Legacies in Education

Race and class inequalities, originally formed through the process of internal colonization, are currently manifested through such social structures as the educational institution. From a CRT perspective, the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* illustrates two of the four aforementioned tenets of CRT: interest convergence and colorblindness. Following a pattern of interest convergence, historical/structural inequalities in segregated education were addressed by integration of education. Integration served the political interests of White elites under the guise of increasing educational equality for Blacks. Additionally, colorblind efforts toward racial equality in education (that is, integration and educational policies that stated color of skin was no longer important) at best may have reduced some incidences of individual racism, but have not addressed historical and structural inequalities between races. From a CRT perspective, *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* was a venue through which White elites restructured public education in a seemingly race-equal way, while simultaneously protecting the White advantage in education.

Because of the racial legacies of internal colonialism, Blacks lack property, wealth, and political representation. Black perspectives within dominant discourse, therefore, are lacking. It is within this framework that legal, political, and educational institutions are governed. Educational systems in particular offer curriculae, methods of instruction, assessment, school funding and de facto segregation that reflect historical racial legacies of internal colonialism. Critical race theory, applied to issues of racial equality in higher education, offers a way to understand how ostensibly race-neutral structures (knowledge, truth, merit, and objectivity) are in fact ways of forming, maintaining, and policing systems

whose boundaries not only are racist, but which also reinforce White supremacy or privilege (Ladson Billings 1998).

In order to combat the effects of these race-neutral or colorblind structures, faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education have an obligation to allow for the voices of traditionally marginalized students. These voices need to be given space to articulate counter-narratives, to be accepted as valid, and to be melded into policies that govern the workings of the institution. White educational institutions that continue to operate without acknowledging the voices of its Black members actively maintain, intentionally or unintentionally, imperialist practices of racial domination (hooks date unknown).

Because CRT allows for understanding racism as it operates on an institutional level, it is a powerful explanatory tool for analyzing the sustained inequality that people of color experience within mainstream American institutions. Black college students in White institutions are frequently looked upon as “problems”, and the community college is frequently seen as a second-tier educational system. Because of large percentages of students of color, the community college is an interesting example of a paradox in higher education. Formed as an overt attempt to address educational inequalities, the community college was conceived as a system that would remove system access barriers. From a CRT perspective, the community college, however, is an institution of higher education and, as such, it mirrors many of the White structures and processes of four-year colleges. Paradoxically, this mirroring has perpetuated racial educational inequality. Therefore, listening to and hearing the experiences as stated by Black students in this “second-tier” system is a necessary first step in shifting the politics of higher education from a White-dominated framework to one

that includes “others”. Only then can the educational system be transformed by, and represent, these “other” voices.

Phenomenology and Grounded Theory as Research Methods

Understanding and illuminating the essence of Black students’ experiences at a White community college requires a methodological approach that focuses on experiences *from the Black students’ own point of view*. Because racial practices in education are based on a history of internal colonialism of the United States, they are often invisible to, and unintentionally enacted by, Whites within White institutions. One such example is the exclusive use of White curriculum. It is essential, therefore, to give voice to marginalized and frequently silenced voices. The mobilization of racial classifications and hierarchies are more often recognized by subordinate actors (Blacks) within the educational setting (Bonilla-Silva 1997) than by people within the mainstream. Black students, therefore, need to be allowed to articulate anti-racist counter-narratives as they participate—as equals—in developing such structures in the educational institution as student services, student life, registration and curriculum, as well as in the nature of pedagogy in the classrooms.

The use of grounded theory in studies that also utilize the phenomenological approach lends both useful structure and a high degree of rigor also found in traditional research. Both grounded theory and phenomenology are used to discover research participants’ meaning-making. While phenomenology affords perhaps a more authentic understanding of the perceptions of the lived realities of the respondents, grounded theory provides the connection between the respondents’ meanings and the patterns of such meanings, as they relate to such extant structures as educational institutions.

Phenomenology

The phenomenological research method offers a distinctive approach in collecting data to study the problem and the paradox of non-parity in education by race. Using a phenomenological approach to data collection allows me to capture the essence of what it means to be Black within a White gateway educational institution, and to illuminate potentially hidden aspects of the experience that inhibit Black students from accessing processes of education or, alternatively, that allow them to access learning in ways similar and equal to Whites. This type of understanding is important because it offers insight both into barriers that prevent full and inclusive educational experiences and into ways in which students from historically subordinated races have circumvented barriers to access learning processes. Knowledge and understandings of the perspectives of Black students have been historically understudied, nor validated by research dominated by White authorities.

As a method, phenomenology calls for "thick descriptions of particular events, rituals, and customs . . . [essentially], being interpretations of interpretations" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:15). In phenomenology, the researcher has neither a position nor a voice of authority. The main role of the researcher is to capture the authentic viewpoints and experiences of the respondents. The terms of the method ensure that any insight into the phenomenon studied constitute, as much as possible, a direct and true a representation of each respondent's perspective.

In the case of this study, investigating the perceptions and experiences of Black students at a White community college demands the researcher must focus primarily on the mind of each subject. To get into the mind of the subject, however, the subject's interpretations must be allowed in the mind of the researcher. In this sense, the relationship

between researcher and subject must shift from one of subject-object to one of subject-subject. In this research paradigm, there is no need for the researcher to interpret a respondent's perceptions and experiences, because within phenomenology, meaning (that is, whatever meaning the subject attaches to his or her experiences) is reality. Accurately capturing and recording the reality of another person involves emptying a researcher's own preconceived notions, so the experiences/perceptions of the subject can be recorded as purely as possible, a process otherwise known as heuristic inquiry (Sciarra 1999).

A benefit of using phenomenology is what separates it—methodologically speaking—from traditional quantitative and most qualitative research methods: whereas all qualitative research values self-reflection, phenomenology values a certain type of self-reflection by the researcher, which involves a mix of rigor and openness to learning, a respect for those who participate as co-investigators, and a sense of humility, which requires an absence of evaluation of conveyed realities by the subject (Merriam 2002). Previous research has not sufficiently studied what it means to be Black in a White educational institution from the standpoint of Black students. Furthermore, adequate research at the two-year college level, which is where the majority of Black students are enrolled, is lacking. The phenomenological method provides a framework for capturing the essence of the experiences of Black community college students, while avoiding an overly deterministic analysis of the "problems" of Black students—or put another way, it seeks to understand how Black students' experiences illuminate educational inequality, rather than assume their experiences are dictated by deficiencies or ill-preparedness (as is commonly assumed by uninformed observers).

The phenomenological method provides equal room for students to articulate the barriers they perceive to their learning, as well as their views about opportunities for circumventing barriers and accessing opportunities for processes of learning within the college. Phenomenological research, in this case, focuses on the meaning of being Black in a White institution, and is accomplished by uncovering and understanding the essence of the experiences beyond the immediate language of respondents' descriptions. Phenomenological research helps to illuminate perhaps an accurate "truth" from the respondents' perspectives—not truth as an outcome of the interpretations of the researcher, but as it is perceived and described by the respondents. Phenomenological research is truly about how individuals "experience" their own experience (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory seeks to uncover categories of experience within a particular phenomenon. In the case of this study, grounded theory was used to expose Black student respondents' patterns of interpretation of reality and the strategies they implemented to navigate a predominantly White community college. Because this method seeks to uncover and connect patterned responses to social structures, it is sociological in nature. Grounded theory is therefore uniquely situated to develop a theoretical understanding of phenomena experienced by certain groups of individuals.

Like phenomenology, grounded theory utilizes heuristic inquiry to gain an understanding of respondents' lived realities. Heuristic inquiry is a distinct departure from much of the previous research on race and education, which all too frequently tries to understand the problems or struggles of Blacks by asking questions such as, "What are the obstacles Black students face?", or "What can be done to increase the success rate of Black

students?". Research based on these types of questions exemplifies how the establishment (most often predominantly White) tries to fix Black students. This viewpoint is frequently justified by entertaining conversations that covertly push the assimilation envelope (that is, assume that Black students must adopt dominant White cultural values in order to succeed), or by imposing a moral framework that attributes Black students' lack of achievement to Black families' presumed lack of values. The assimilation[17] and morality approaches, however, "fail to see that the presence and predicaments of black people are neither additions to nor defections from American life, but rather *constitutive elements of that life"* (West 1993:3, emphasis in original). These two approaches are overly deterministic and naturalized, and they fail to account for the effects of hierarchical systems based on race in political, economic, educational and cultural systems throughout the U.S. The assimilation and morality approaches also do not take into account the various ways Blacks have responded, and continue to respond, to this dominance, or the effects on Blacks of continuing dominant discourse in institutions imbued with the invisible privilege of whiteness.

This imposition of a White framework of thought seldom yields fully accurate or reliable understanding of the essence of Black students' experiences. Therefore, the inclusion of the most valuable voice in the discussion of educational equality often remains unheard. A qualitative approach, utilizing the methodological strengths of phenomenology and grounded theory and located within the theoretical framework of CRT, enables student voices to be heard without imposing either of the White lenses of assimilation or morality.

Using a Combination of Phenomenology and Grounded Theory

Combining phenomenology and grounded theory creates improved depth and structure of research into Black student perceptions. When allowed, will such students

articulate experiences of ethnic tokenism (for example, others' assumptions that the student represents her/his entire ethnic group), loneliness, tensions, acceptance, assimilation, structural barriers or opportunities, interpersonal challenges or successes?

Phenomenology is uniquely situated to ferret out these understandings because it acknowledges the respondents' perceptions of their realities. This approach produces a certain level and type of authenticity of data which is needed to develop an understanding of race and higher education. Similar to phenomenology, grounded theory provides a "zigzag" structure for analyzing data and generating theory: interviewing, analyzing interview data, gathering more data and subsequently analyzing (Creswell 1998). This process links the phenomena studied to contextual and causal conditions, then to strategies employed by the respondents, and finally the consequences of these strategies.

The task of the phenomenological interviewer is to check for understanding and to maintain a general focus on the broad research questions used in the interview. In grounded theory, this practice is demonstrated by beginning with a broad research question and allowing it to change several times during data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is designed to study processes and to develop theory from the patterns that emerge from studying such processes.

Both grounded theory and phenomenology align closely with the goal of CRT to accommodate the advancement of previously marginalized perspectives and to challenge normative White perspectives and structures. Blackness, due to a history and legacy of internal colonialism, is frequently interpreted as a reified status, one defined by Whites (hooks 1994). Phenomenological and grounded theory methods can be used to show that the racial category of Black is a historical construct, and that it is also performative[18]. By

allowing room for alternative interpretations of "what it means to be Black", race—as a reified status—has the possibility of being contested (Butler 1988). By contesting such static and reified understandings, race becomes open for redefinition and therefore able to be repositioned within White dominated educational systems, possibly lessening race based marginalization. Thus, the use of CRT, grounded theory, and phenomenology not only challenges traditional voices of authority, but it may also empower the traditionally silenced Black student by making him/her a voice of authority.

Research Site: History of XYZ Community College

This study is situated at a Community College in the Midwest. To protect its identity, this community college will be referred to as, "XYZ Community College". XYZ Community College was founded in 1966 in the midst of the national community college movement aimed at democratizing and availing equal access to higher education to all students, regardless of class, ability, or any other differentiating factors.

There is one main campus of XYZ Community College, located in a city within a tri-state area. This tri-state region has an urban population of just over 140,000 people. There are two branch campuses beyond that area: A north campus and an east campus. Both branch campuses are over 70 miles away from the main campus in towns that are predominantly White. The main campus of XYZ Community College is also predominantly White. Demographically, 85.8 percent of the population is White and 1.7 percent is Black. This difference is even more pronounced than the national college population percentages of 79 percent White and 10.5 percent Black (Sperling and Sander 2007).

The economies of these towns and their surrounding counties are agriculturally based. The geography is predominantly rural, dotted with farms and small towns. The main campus is situated in the only major urban area in a 90-mile radius. Agricultural processing plants (grain and animal) are the major employers in the area. Two of the top three employers are meat processing plants, one of which is a Fortune 500 company. This is a blue collar, manufacturing, manual labor-driven market. It is White in its community identity, evidenced by the tradition of farming (predominantly a White activity in this area) and the much-publicized annual celebration of White cultural "heroes" (such as the multi-million dollar Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center). Local politics are dominated by Whites in elected and appointed offices.

The racial composition of the administration of XYZ Community College reflects the racial composition of the community. A nine-member Board of Directors provides governance for the college. Board members are elected from the nine districts in the six-county service area. All board members have been and are currently White. Additionally, all have been male, with the current exception of one White female board member. There have been two presidents in the history of the college. The past and current presidents are both White males. Additionally, all current and past Deans and Vice Presidents are White. In the middle levels of the college's leadership, there are three positions (Director of Institutional Research and two Department Chairs) filled by people of color; however, none of these three people are Black.

There is also little racial diversity among the other levels of leadership (that is, project directors or coordinators) or the staff (that is, secretaries, information technology personnel, and so on). Of the full-time employees in 2006, two of the 96 males (of which 82 were white)

and one of the 149 females (141 were white) were Black (*XYZ Community College Fact Book* 2007). The college's *Fact Book* further explains that, of the part-time employees in 2006, one of the 165 males (134 were white) and one of the 219 females (176 were white) was Black.

Breaking the faculty ranks down by race also highlights the White presence at the college. According to the *2007 Fact Book of XYZ Community College*, only one full-time faculty member was Black, and no part-time faculty member was Black (out of a total of 284 faculty). However, in the fall of 2008, the only Black full-time instructor left the college. These numbers represent the current numbers of Black/White diversity at the college, and reflect historical diversity ratios at the school.

The student body is also predominantly White. The twelve-year trend on minority enrollment indicates total college enrollment increasing from 2,952 in 1995 to 5,284 in 2006 (*XYZ Community College Fact Book* 2007). The White head count rose from 2,494 to 3,951, and the Black head-count rose from 44 to 102 during those same years (2007). While the Black student body only makes up 1.9 percent, or 102 students, it is significantly higher than the percentage and/or number of Black employees at the college (2007). There is also racial disparity in graduation rates. Of all the students enrolled, only a portion graduate from XYZ Community College. For example, 16.6 percent (17) of Black students and 20 percent (782) of White students were conferred degrees for the 2004/2005 academic year (2007).

XYZ Community College runs on the traditional semester schedule, with a full summer semester schedule, as well as a "winterim", a 10-day period between the fall and spring semesters. Credit transfer classes are offered in each term. In its inception in the 1960s, XYZ Community College was strictly Vocational-Technical (offering one- or two-

year non-transfer degrees). Beginning in 1987, the college began to offer transfer level classes (classes which meet the requirements for four-year freshman- and sophomore-level courses, and which transfer to four-year institutions).

This research is particularly interested in the experiences of Black students in transfer level classes, because these courses are necessary for earning a baccalaureate degree. This study's focus on Black community college students enrolled in transfer courses is particularly important, given the fact that the majority of Black college students start at the community college level. Understanding the conditions surrounding success at the community college and, therefore, possible matriculation to a four-year college is important because it is only after reaching the Baccalaureate level that Blacks reach economic parity with their White counterparts. XYZ Community College is an appropriate location to examine the experiences of Black students in a White college. The large size of the college and the preponderance of White leadership, personnel, structures, and practices in this two-year open-enrollment educational institution make it an ideal location to illuminate the perceptions Black students have of their experiences with accessing processes of learning at the community college--and therefore possibilities of matriculation to the four-year college level.

Study Timeline

This study began in the spring of 2009. Interviews, preliminary organization, and analysis of the data took place during the 2009 spring semester. The bulk of data analysis and writing occurred during the fall of 2009 and early in the spring 2010 semester.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are especially important when human subjects are involved. Given that participation in this project was voluntary and respondents were fully informed to obtain their consent to be involved in the study, the risks were minimal. To address the risk of discomfort regarding questions about racial and individual experiences related to race, a list of professionals was given to each participant, so they might contact and be able to talk to someone if their interview experience proved to be upsetting. This list included the name and phone number of the campus counselor and the Sociology Department Chair (see Appendix C).

Confidentiality has been maintained by keeping respondents' identifying characteristics secured. Participant rights and confidentiality are held in the highest regard especially when reporting and disseminating the data. The respondents in this study remain anonymous, and there is no connection between an individual participant and her or his responses, except by pseudonym. Any tapes, recorders, transcripts, or field notes are stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Any data stored on the researcher's computer is located only on a secured, password protected drive. No person other than the researcher has access to the material. Appendix C contains details regarding the informed consent procedures.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Important to evaluating the soundness of qualitative data and rigor of qualitative research are the concepts of "trustworthiness" and "verification". These terms are analogous to the traditional terms of validity and reliability in quantitative data analysis. A qualitative

study that is deemed trustworthy and rigorous is credible, transferable, dependable, confirmable, and verifiable.

In order to be credible, of course, the research needs to produce believable findings. Prolonged data engagement, triangulation, debriefing with peers, audit trails, and member checks are all processes that establish credibility. Thus, it is necessary to explain the implementation of each of these credibility checks in this research.

Prolonged data engagement was achieved by devoting significant amounts of time in the data collection process to understand the perspectives of the respondents, and to build a trusting relationship. The utilization of Seidman's (2006) three-interview technique, where each respondent participates in three separate in-depth interviews, was another constraint on brevity, and it ensured adequate quality and quantity of time spent with the respondents.

Triangulation makes use of multiple sources of information, different methods, and multiple investigators. This procedure is important for achieving an acceptable level of trustworthiness and validity of data. In this study, triangulation was achieved by utilizing a multiple interview process. Each respondent was interviewed three separate times. After each interview, the data were examined for categories and patterns. At the beginning of each subsequent interview, the respondents were asked to clarify and expound upon such patterns. The combination of phenomenology and grounded theory enabled greater depth of understanding of a particular respondent's perception, of patterns from the same respondent, as well as connections between respondents.

The process of triangulation included Life History Calendars and member checks. The use Life History Calendars is important, because it serves as a methodological balance to oral data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. Life History Calendars provide a

structure for recall for respondents, increase accuracy of recall, and provide thick descriptions of the essence of their experiences. Member checks, in which a summary of the transcript is given back to the respondent for review and comment, ensure that the account of the respondent's experience is true and accurate. Member checks provide respondents with multiple opportunities to check and respond, clarify, verify, and change data taken at all points of the three-step interview process. For this study, the corroboration with and feedback provided by the respondents helped to ensure that their reality, the essence of their experience—not the researcher's interpretation of their experience—was conveyed and recorded.

Debriefing with peers in the form of an audit trail is also a common and dependable way to construct high levels of trustworthiness of a study. An audit trail consists of all the information and documents that chronologically describe the researcher's thoughts, actions, and processes. An independent auditor evaluated this study to uncover any discrepancies in conclusions drawn from the data. This auditor, a faculty member at a college different from the research site, possessed experience with qualitative research. Additionally, peer review of several interview transcripts has been performed. In this study, three scholars with no connection to this research were asked to serve as peer reviewers. Taken together, outside evaluation of the coding of transcripts by peer reviewers and an audit trail audited by a peer auditor helped to assess dependability, and was used to establish conformability measures.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from January through March of 2009. All data gathered from the respondents was collected with explicit permission from the respondents and in full

compliance with the Iowa State University and XYZ Community College Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines (Appendix C: Informed Consent Document).

Respondents for this study were recruited through questionnaires (Appendix A: Research Recruitment Questionnaire), which were administered to the majority of XYZ Community College students enrolled in classes that transfer to four-year institutions (that is, Transfer Liberal Arts classes). I discussed this research project with the Liberal Arts faculty, and asked them to administer the questionnaire in all of their classes. Respondents appropriate for this study needed to identify themselves as Black. Since racial identity is not always obvious to an outside observer, instructors were asked to give the recruitment questionnaire to all students in their classes. Approximately 80 percent of the Liberal Arts faculty complied with my request and administered the questionnaire in their classes.

The aforementioned recruitment survey did not elicit twenty respondents; therefore, I switched to a snowball sampling technique. Through networking with Black students with whom I already had associations, I was able to secure more respondents. Through referrals made by each subsequent respondent, I was able to secure a total of twenty-one respondents. Eleven of the respondents were male, and ten were female.

The original intent of this research was to understand the perceptions of Black students at a predominantly White community college. When I began this project, I did not know which parts of the African Diaspora the respondents would represent. Although all twenty-one respondents indicated their primary racial identity as being Black, their countries of origin varied. Of the twenty-one respondents, seven were African-born Black, and fourteen were U.S.-born Black. However, because White dominant culture often categorizes

all members of the African Diaspora similarly, I included all students who identified as being Black, regardless of their national origin.

As possible respondents were identified (18 years of age or older, a primary racial identity of Black and willingness to participate), I followed-up with a phone call to each student to confirm his or her willingness to participate, answer any questions, and set up a date, place, and time for the initial interview (Appendix B contains the Telephone Script). Although the usual number of respondents in phenomenological studies often varies from 1 to 15, the usual number of respondents in a grounded theory study is between 20 and 30 respondents. The larger sample size in this study (N=twenty-one) permits both methods of phenomenology and grounded theory to be used.

All interviews followed an in-depth, semi-structured format. Additionally, each respondent was interviewed three times in order to obtain greater depth of information (Seidman 2006). The first interview, Interview A, used a Life History Calendar (Appendix D), which was focused on gaining an understanding of each respondent's life-long perspectives, experiences, and practices as a Black person in a White society. The second interview, Interview B, focused on gaining a specific understanding of each respondent's insights and interpretations of their experience of being Black in a White educational institution (Appendix E). The third interview, Interview C, focused on how the respondents understood or "made sense of" their experience of being Black in a White society and—more specifically—of being Black within a White community college environment.

During the initial interview (Interview A), a combination of life history and demographic questions were asked, using a simplified Life History Calendar (Appendix D).

After showing and explaining the format of the Life History Calendar to the respondents, I interviewed each respondent regarding their lived experiences with the following institutions (education, family, living arrangements, employment, legal institution, health care and formal civic organizations). I also asked them about their perceptions of how their experiences within these institutions were informed by race. I transcribed all field notes I took on the Life History Calendar along with the tape recorded interview. This variety of life events experienced by the respondent needed to be recorded in order to gain an understanding of the possible factors upon which their experience as a Black student in a White community college may be predicated.

A Life History Calendar increases the accuracy of historical recall, and provides a somewhat structured format in which to gather historical, demographic information (Freedman et al. 1988). The importance of gathering this type of life history information is two-fold. First, taken together with the two subsequent interviews, it provides "thick", very detailed, historical descriptions of the essence of each respondent's experience. Second, it allows the researcher to see the type of connections that exist between one's historically racial experience with institutions and the essence of his or her current experience at XYZ Community College. An understanding of each respondent's own version of his or her life history is also an important first step in situating and acknowledging his or her voice. Additionally, the Life History Calendar serves as a methodological balance to the general oral history solicited in the initial interview.

As previously stated, all interviews were semi-structured. This structure allowed for consistency as well as flexibility to engage in natural and spontaneous conversation, which yielded deeper insights and thicker, richer descriptions of events and phenomena. Interviews

were tape recorded with the express permission of the respondent (Appendix C). Handwritten notes were also taken during the interviews to record information not able to be captured by the tape recorder (for example, non-verbal communication).

The respondents were able to choose the location they felt most comfortable to be interviewed. Twenty of the twenty-one respondents chose one of three small, private conference rooms on the XYZ Community College campus. The remaining respondent requested I interview her at her home. All interviews were conducted with the respondent and myself being the only people present. The one exception was the first of three interviews with a respondent who requested I interview her in her home. Her two young sons were in the house, but out of earshot, for part of her first interview.

I personally interviewed each respondent. Each respondent's first interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Their second interview lasted approximately from 60 to 90 minutes and their third about 45 to 60 minutes. Over the course of three interviews, an average of three and one-half to four hours was spent with each respondent.

With the exception of two respondents, three separate interviews (Interviews A, B, and C) were conducted over the course of ten to fourteen days. Of the two respondents who did not participate in all three interviews, one informed me at the initial interview that he was only interested in being interviewed once. He stated he felt a little uncomfortable talking to a White woman about being a Black man, and said his business was not necessarily my business. For this particular situation, I condensed all three interviews into the one interview to which he consented (A, the life history narrative; B, his perceptions of what it is like to be a Black student at XYZ college; C, how he makes sense of race, given what he shared related to A and B). The other respondent who did not complete the full set of interviews completed

Interview A and B, but declined Interview C. Given the detail of information from this respondent in Interviews A and B, the data from this respondent is considered usable for this study.

Transcription of interview tapes occurred as soon as possible after each interview. All transcriptions were completed by May 2009. In cases where respondents could be located, brief transcription summaries from interviews A, B and C were given back to them to review and comment. I was present when respondents reviewed the summaries, and hand-transcribed any oral feedback from the respondents. These responses were then added (as memos) to their original interview transcripts. All interviews and responses were collected, coded and filed using the Nvivo 8 computer program. Approximately sixty percent (60%) of the respondents were able to participate in the review and member checking of their interview summaries. Member checking (a process in which respondents review and validate a summary of their own interview transcripts) is important, because it provides a function for the "other" in the research process and lends credibility to qualitative research projects by bringing the outside into the process (Merriam, 2002). The point is not to get locked into a traditionally quantitative interpretation of an existing truth, but to remain open to each participant's experience of the phenomena. Member checking provides additional verification that the interpretations of an experience are, indeed, those of the participant. All respondents confirmed the accuracy of the summaries of their transcripts.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological and grounded theory research amasses huge amounts of data to be interpreted. Due to the amount of detail in the raw data, and in order to ensure no detail is

missed, it is essential that it be transcribed and coded as soon after collection as possible. Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (1998) identify various stages to data analysis from the phenomenological[19] and grounded theory approaches, respectively.

In the first step of phenomenological analysis, the researcher is required to consciously situate her/himself in a position of "epoche", which means that the researcher be free from suppositions (Moustakas 1994; Creswell 1998). In epoche, the researcher must set aside all preconceived notions, experiences, and beliefs about the phenomenon studied. This process includes consciously trying to negate the researcher's own personally constructed belief system about the topic of study. In order to accomplish this state, all that is known and believed about the phenomenon is placed in a separate part of consciousness. The part of consciousness that is left is the bracketed world the researcher will inhabit when researching the unknown phenomena. Moustakas (1994) explains that, "the world in the bracket has been cleared of ordinary thought and is present before us as a phenomenon to be gazed upon, to be known naively and freshly through a 'purified' consciousness" (85).

The second and third steps within phenomenological research are called phenomenological reduction (Creswell 1998; Marshall and Rossman 2006). In these steps, the researcher "horizontalizes", or keeps on an equal plane, the data from interviews, and treats each statement as having equal worth. The researcher develops a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements that represent the meaning of the experience for the researcher. The fourth through sixth steps are termed, "structural synthesis", because they involve the imaginative exploration of all possible meanings and divergent perspectives. It includes a reflection and merging of the researcher's bracketed perspective and each respondent's

perspective to construct an essence of the experience that is understood as a composite reality.

In addition to conducting these stages of phenomenological data analysis, I also conducted analysis of the data according to the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory provides a procedure for developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial coding), building a "story" that connects the categories (selective coding), and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions (Creswell 1998:150). Although the phenomenological method allowed me a unique understanding of each respondent's perception of their experiences at XYZ Community College, as a sociologist, I felt the need to take the social context into account and look for patterns of behavior. Grounded theory allowed for this research strategy.

NVivo8, a computer program designed to aid in analysis of qualitative data, was used to help manage, store, and analyze the data. Field and tape-recorded notes were transcribed verbatim and loaded into NVivo8. All transcripts were analyzed individually to establish coding categories. This process consisted of "open coding", by which I focused on identifying and categorizing emerging themes independent of a theoretical framework, and then of "focused coding", or "axial coding", where I looked for consistent themes that emerged within the theoretical framework outlined earlier in this chapter. Emerging elements of each respondent's experiences was collated into open and focused/theoretical themes and sub-themes and analyzed using NVivo8. Selective coding was then performed, and theoretical ideas were developed and proposed (see Chapters 5 and 6 for the discussion of the emergent theories).

Even though there are some disadvantages of using a computer program to assist with the management and storage of data, (that is, it may distance the researcher from the data, it may take time to learn the system, or the system may not meet all the needs of the researcher), the benefits in this case are expected to outweigh the disadvantages. The benefits of using this software include having an organized storage system for the large quantities of data, which makes the data easier to retrieve. Additionally, NVivo8 includes the capability to run multiple queries, which may encourage a more structured, and therefore critical, examination of the data.

Limitations of the Research Project

There are several limitations of this research project. First, because grounded theory and phenomenological research capture the essence of what an experience means to an individual and attempt to theorize based on the experiences of these individuals, findings cannot be applied to a general population. The results of this study may only be loosely generalized to other Black students within XYZ Community College, or perhaps to other Black students in community colleges that have similar structures and demographics as XYZ Community College.

Second, although they provide good structure for interviews and prompt respondent recall, Life History Calendars, if too structured, can hinder or work in conflict with the phenomenological process. The strengths of Life History Calendars can also be detriments if they are too structured, stilting full respondent recall and perception of associations with other experiences. In order to address these concerns, the Life History Calendar developed for this study is brief and open-ended. Since Life History Calendars are not central to the

phenomenological approach, they were used only for soliciting specific information during the first of three interviews and triangulation purposes. Efforts were made to ensure that the Life History Calendar used was brief and open so as not to structure or stilt too much of the research process (see Appendix D: Life History Narrative Calendar).

A third limitation of this project is the scope of CRT praxis. According to Su (2007), true CRT praxis means that everyday practices match rhetoric for social change. This includes *all* everyday practices: involvement and organizing in the community, organizing activities inside the larger college structure, and activities within the classroom. In this study, the essence of what it means to be Black within a White community college is given voice. While organizing activities inside the college are explored, community links are not included. Even though this study does not explore the effects of community links on the perceptions of Black students, the results of this study do provide rich descriptions of how Black students navigate this White college campus and also on the potential threats different groups of Black students pose to the White college system.

On a systemic level, for comprehensive reform to happen in White institutions situated in predominantly White communities, students within such local institutions as community colleges need to develop race consciousness and act according to this consciousness. Additionally, communities of color need to demonstrate race consciousness by entering into racially conscious political practices. This is what Su (2007) refers to as "bridging spaces", the essential link between communities and educational institutions. This is important, because full CRT praxis demands that real reforms come both from the community into the college as well as from inside the college and the classroom.

Importantly, two of the three aspects of CRT praxis are explored in this research: Organizing activities of Black students within the structure of the college (for example, establishing sites-of-belonging, advocating for equal representation on student senate boards, and so on) and activities within the classroom (that is, advocating for race-conscious curriculum). The third element of CRT praxis, involvement and organizing in the community, is partially explored by recording the essence of consciousness and educational political activity within the local Black community via the perceptions of the Black students. While these perceptions are valid and offer a view of the state of the Black community, they are filtered through the lens of the student. No interviews for this study took place with community members or groups to ascertain their state of political consciousness or involvement with XYZ Community College. While this limitation serves as a suggestion for future research, it does not negate the contribution this research makes toward understanding processes that affect equal educational experiences and outcomes of Black community college students.

Despite these limitations, utilizing a combined methodological approach of both phenomenology and grounded theory is most appropriate for this study. Using the words of Black students to understand their lived realities in White educational institutions provides a unique and comprehensive view of barriers to learning and ways in which these barriers are perceived and navigated by the Black students themselves.

Research Respondents

Twenty-one students at XYZ Community College volunteered to participate in this project. All respondents indicated their primary or predominant race/ethnicity as Black on the

recruitment questionnaire (Appendix A). The specific research focus of this project was on students who intended to transfer to a four-year college. All respondents, therefore, were enrolled in transfer level courses at the time of participant selection.

All potential respondents went through a secondary screening process to confirm their willingness to participate and to set a time for the initial interview (Appendix B contains the Telephone Script). If they were still viable and willing participants, then they were given the Informed Consent Document (Appendix C). All student respondents were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Because of the open-admission policy of the community college, the student population tends to be heterogeneous regarding age, length of time in college, GPA, and class position. This variance is reflected in the respondents. Race (not age, GPA, and so on) is the main variable this research is interested in exploring. The Black student respondents interviewed for this study varied not only by gender and age, but also by country of origin (African-born Blacks or U.S.-born Blacks), self-reported racial ancestry, preference of race identification (such as African American, Black, Black African, Mixed) and skin shade (very light to dark). The aforementioned demographics were therefore noted and presented in table format in Appendix F: Casebook.

In the following section, I provide an introduction to the respondents. There are four subsections representing four distinct categories of respondents: African-born females, African-born males, U.S.-born Black females and U.S.-born Black males.

African-born Females

Sera is a 21 year-old Tutsi Rwandan refugee. During the Rwandan genocide, she fled Rwanda with her family to Sudan. After living in Sudan for several years, she and her family

received asylum status in the United States. She has been in the United States for six years. She has a medium dark shade of skin and refers to herself (and prefers that others refer to her) as a Black African. Sera's age of migration to the United States makes her different from other African respondents in this study, since all the others migrated as adults.

Karen is 28 years old and from Kenya. She came to the United States eight years prior to this study to attend college. She has dark skin and refers to herself (and prefers that others refer to her) as a Black African. Due to Kenya being a former British colony, Karen's primary language is English. Her language sets her apart from all other African respondents in this study.

Amelia is 31 years old. She is from Congo. She escaped the war in Congo by fleeing to Benin. After living one year in Benin, she migrated to the United States—eight years prior to this study. She has medium dark skin and refers to herself (and prefers that others refer to her) as a Black African.

Savina is 31 years old. She was born in Togo and lived there from birth to age 7. From 7 to 17 years of age, she lived in France. She moved back to Togo and lived there until she was 26. At age 26, six years priors to this study, she migrated to the United States. She has dark skin and refers to herself (and prefers that others refer to her) as a Black African.

African-born Males

Chris is 41 years old. He was born in Togo. During the civil war in Togo, his mother and he migrated to neighboring Benin and lived in a refugee camp for 7 years. He has been in the Unites States for approximately 8 years. He has dark skin and refers to himself (and prefers that others refer to him) as a Black African.

Alex is 38 years old. He was born in Togo. He moved to France approximately at the age of 8, and returned to Togo at age 18. Since then, and prior to migrating to the United States, Alex lived in Norway and in Thailand as was a member of the French military. Alex has been in the United States for approximately 8 years. He has dark skin and refers to himself (and prefers that others refer to him) as a Black African.

Noah is 25 years old. He is from Nigeria. He has been in the United States for 5 years. He has dark skin and refers to himself (and prefers that others refer to him) as a Black African.

U.S.-born Black Females

Jazmin is 23 years old. She has a medium skin tone. She self identifies (and prefers that others reference her race) as African American. She has previously attended a predominantly White four-year college and a predominantly Black community college.

Tora is 27 years old. She has a light skin tone. She self identifies as mixed or Native (3/4 Native American, 1/4 Black), but says that others refer to her as Black or African American because of her coarse, curly hair. Tora has attended a Native American Indian community college prior to her attendance at the research site.

Raven is 30 years old. She has a medium dark skin tone. She self identifies (and prefers that others reference her race) as African American or Black. Raven has attended predominantly white community colleges, including the college used as the research site for this project. She has also attended a historically Black college.

Nikki is 28 years old. She has a medium skin tone. She self identifies as African American and prefers that others refer to her as African American. She has attended a historically Black college in the south.

Trina is 26 years old. She has a medium skin tone. She identifies as African American and prefers that others refer to her as African American. Trina has no previous college experience.

Aliyah is 31 years old. She has a medium skin tone. She refers to herself as Black and prefers that others refer to her as Black as well. Aliyah has no prior college experience.

U.S.-born Black Males

Andre is 20 years old. He has a very light skin tone. While others categorize him as African American, he takes great care to explain he is 1/2 White and 1/2 Black. Since explaining this racial mix to others is cumbersome, Andre acquiesces to being categorized as African American. Andre has no prior college experience.

Joshua is 18 years old. He has a light skin tone. He refers to himself as mixed (1/2 Black, 1/2 Native American), but he is aware he is perceived by others as Black much of the time, and also acknowledges the Black side of his racial identity. He does not have prior college experience.

William is 44 years old. He has a dark skin tone. He refers to himself (and prefers that others refer to him) as African American. He has attended a predominantly White Midwestern private four-year college prior to attending XYZ Community College.

Joseph is 21 years old. He has a medium skin tone. Joseph describes himself as mixed (7/8 Black, 1/8 Native American), but refers to himself as African American. He stated that since his Native blood is so small, others also categorize him as African American. Joseph does not have any previous college experience.

Robert is 18 years old. He has a dark skin tone. He has prior college experience at a local predominantly White private four-year college. He categorizes himself as Black and

prefers that others to refer to him as African American. He consented only to the first two of the three interviews. Due to the depth of information provided in the first two interviews, the information he provided is used for this project. His lack of three distinct interviews sets him and Darryl (see below) apart from all the other respondents.

Tyler is 28 years old. He has a light skin tone. He refers to himself as mixed (1/2 Black, 1/2 White) but prefers that others refer to him as Black. He has prior college experience, having attended a large state university in the Midwest.

Jamal is 48 years old. He has a medium to dark skin tone. He refers to himself as Black, but accepts being categorized and referred to by others as African American. He does not have prior college experience.

Darryl is 34 years old. He has a dark skin tone. He refers to himself as Black but prefers that others refer to him as African American. Darryl consented only to one interview as opposed to three separate interviews. Therefore, I compressed all three interviews into one 90-minute interview. This relatively short amount of time (and one interview format) sets Darryl apart from the other respondents.

The next two chapters present the findings of this study. These findings reveal that, depending on perceived resources and barriers, respondents describe adopting one of four strategies of racial adaptation: *separation, ambivalence, alternate or reluctant acceptance*. These strategies vary depending on the level of acceptance or rejection of the stereotyped label of “the generic Black student”. The racial strategies of both *separation* and *ambivalence* reject the label of “generic Black student”. The *alternate* strategy substitutes Black consciousness for the stereotype and the strategy of *reluctant acceptance* internalizes this stereotype.

The information in these two chapters also reveals that each strategy of racial adaptation contains a unique race performance exhibited through body projects and differing degrees and expressions of agency. Therefore, each strategy is unique in the potential threats and opportunities posed to the college and the individual respondents.

Black students enacting and performing these racial strategies are both constrained and motivated by the predominantly White structure in which they find themselves. Alternatively, their acts and performances affect the college structure in unique ways. These findings reveal an intricate interaction between racial and organizational expectations and the students' own descriptions of their conduct at this predominantly White college.

CHAPTER 4. BARRIERS AND RESOURCES

Because of historical racism, Whiteness is privileged over Blackness in the United States. Norms and practices associated with Blackness are embedded in social institutions, including education. The White-dominated history of education results in White educational structures, wherein sets of White dominated educational expectations and experiences reside. Consequently, Black perspectives, ways of knowing, and experiences are devalued or unrecognized. Because *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* essentially assimilated segregated education of Blacks into an existing White educational framework, education today takes place within a White structure, where White ways of knowing, doing, and being are privileged over "other"—or, for the purpose of this study, Black—ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education may be viewed as a two-edged decision. On one hand, the ruling ensured greater educational opportunity for Black students, by ensuring access to all educational systems. On the other hand, integrated education, in practice, became built upon a racial hierarchy—one whose terms were dictated by White teachers and administrators, and which included both a curriculum that denied a history of racism and a system of extra-curricular activities that privileged White students over students of color. "Access", in other words, never ensured equality.

This historical racial hierarchy has contemporary manifestations. One manifestation is the stereotype of the "generic Black student". This stereotype characterizes Black students as having such qualities as laziness, lower intellectual ability than White students, being hand-out- and special treatment-driven, and being inherently deviant, loud, and unnecessarily forceful. The lasting impact of this stereotype—that they lack innate ability to succeed at the

same level as Whites in U.S. educational institutions—makes for a conflicted academic environment with which they must contend daily (Arnett Ferguson 2001).

Sociological perspectives, however, tell a story different from the stereotypes. According to social identity theory, people desire to create and to maintain a positive self-concept as a result of group identification. The same is true for positive social identity as a result of an intergroup comparison processes that involve in-groups and out-groups (Operario and Fiske 1999). People define and understand themselves based on the groups to which they perceive belonging. For members of such historically marginalized groups as Blacks, two sometimes competing forces attenuate this identity: first, the desire to associate with same race groups as a means to confirm their positive self-esteem; second, the tendency to prefer groups valued by the mainstream culture that confirm race-based status differences between Blacks and Whites. Overall, the Black students who participated in this study reported great difficulty achieving such positive results from group membership.

This perceived difficulty is explainable, however. The respondents in this study describe holding a perception that they are consistently defined by Whites on campus as being members of a stigmatized group. Furthermore, there are exceedingly small numbers of possible group members and limited group membership options. Intergroup relations, such as those between Blacks and Whites in the United States, rest upon a strong history of race-based violence and conflict, and continue to be disharmonious—even in the current atmosphere of egalitarianism and racial equality.

Social psychological research explains that intergroup relations depend on several basic processes. One of these processes is social categorization (Hogg 2003). By segmenting the social world into groups defined by specific characteristics or prototypes, people gain a

sense of identity and belonging. This process is not inherently problematic. However, it is when these evaluations and segmentations of others are based on historical constructs of inequality, and are further supported by contemporary inequalities, that negative intergroup relations result. Accordingly, because of the long history of race-based stigmas, Black students in contemporary educational institutions are most often categorized into a racially devalued out-group.

How do U.S.-born and African-born Black students deal with being categorized as a devalued out-group? My findings suggest they encounter a common barrier of being cast as outsiders. The outsider status into which they are cast takes various forms, and is the stereotype of the generic black student.

Even though all the Black students in this study report experiencing this common barrier, *how* they experience this outsider status varies. Additionally, although all of the respondents report attempting to navigate the barrier, not everyone had the same access to resources, nor were they able to utilize these resources equally. It is important to understand how these Black students perceive, deal with, or attempt to navigate the barrier.

For that reason, clarification of the nature of the barrier is necessary. Therefore, this study will examine and define processes within the educational system that, when they are equitably accessible and usable, serve as pathways for Black students to succeed in their education. This understanding will illuminate ways in which status hierarchies, such as race, are constructed, reinforced and, at times, circumvented by the people involved.

The first section of this chapter discusses the common barrier of being cast as an outsider—a barrier experienced in varying ways by all twenty-one respondents in their daily

college life. Because African-born Blacks perceive and understand this barrier differently from U.S.-born Blacks, their individual thoughts are treated separately.

Second, this chapter discusses 1) the ways by which the respondents describe this barrier manifesting, 2) the ways by which they attempted to mobilize resources to deal with it, and 3) the pattern of how the African-born Blacks and U.S.-born Blacks perceived somewhat different access to and utilization of resources.

Perceiving and Experiencing the Common Barrier: Being Cast as a Racially Devalued Outsider

Common to all twenty-one respondents was the experience of being cast as an outsider at XYZ Community College. Being forced into a stigmatized outsider status by being thrust into a stereotype is what they perceive as the main barrier to their ability to function similarly to all other students at this college.

In this chapter, the concept of *barriers* refers to a condition or structure that makes it difficult to access or to progress equally within a system of learning. *Barriers* as a category is appropriate to this study since, at some point during the interview process, all twenty-one respondents described their experience at XYZ Community College as being difficult, challenging, or troublesome. Most prevalent are descriptions of situations or feelings from which the respondents previously concluded they did not belong. Overwhelmingly, respondents' descriptions convey the shared perception that they perceived this lack of belonging as result of being forced into a racially based stereotype.

African-born Blacks: Experiencing the Stereotype of the Generic Black Student from the Racial Identity Standpoint of **Separation**

The African-born respondents in this study describe a common process of becoming aware of the meaning of race, or Blackness, in the United States. Upon understanding this meaning as negative, they discursively position themselves separately from U.S.-born Blacks. This process of distancing themselves from U.S.-born Blacks allows them to attempt to protect themselves from the negative stereotype of the generic Black student. The African-born Blacks in this study sought membership in the dominant group (that is, White students), in part, through a process of defensive othering (Schwalbe et al. 2000). The process of defining themselves as being different or separate from U.S.-born Blacks—and, so goes the rationale, therefore similar to Whites—is an element of identity work known as *separation*.

Even though the identity standpoint of *separation* is effective in distancing African-born students from the stereotype of the generic Black student, they nonetheless report feeling misunderstood and cast by Whites into another stereotype: that of the "generic African". The African-born Blacks in this study describe the stereotype of the generic African as an alienating experience, because the stereotype is full of distortions and misunderstandings of what it means to be an African-born Black. However, they unanimously perceive this condition as an easier barrier to navigate, and one that is less constraining, than the stereotype of the generic Black (U.S.-born).

The pervasiveness of racial stereotypes in U.S. culture and media makes race and skin color differences both visible and salient for the African-born respondents in this study. When discussing their awareness of such stereotypes, these respondents expressed frustration with being inaccurately labeled as U.S.-born Black (that is, African American). African-born

Black respondents (Christopher, Alex, Noah, Amelia, Savina, Sera, and Karen) each described feeling unfairly stereotyped as a generic Black student. Sera, for example, illustrated how being mislabeled manifested itself in being stereotyped not as an African, which is in itself harmful, but as a U.S.-born Black (that is, African American), and which resulted in her feeling misunderstood in a multilayered way:

> **Sera:** Cause, you know what it [being stereotyped] does to a person, really. Inside it breaks you, it really does, to be—not defeated but it's almost demoralizing . . . And it's like not only do I feel out of place because I'm African but you're going to put those stereotypes at me that don't even represent me. It's not even who I am. For example, one of the girls saying like, you're obnoxious, like these regular stereotypes that they give a lot of African American females. I'd understand if you treated me like the stereotypes you know of Africans, but don't put me in a different category and treat me that way.

As a result of the barrier of being inaccurately categorized as U.S.-born Blacks (that is, African American) and thrust into the attendant stereotype, these respondents attempted to present themselves as African-born Blacks, not as U.S.-born Blacks. They therefore separated themselves from the stereotype of the generic Black student. Upon doing so, they reported another stereotype: That of "African Black" being thrust upon them. They also reported frustration due to the inaccuracies of this stereotype. For example, when explaining that these stereotypes were based upon ignorance of Africa, Sera, Alex and Noah expressed weariness of having questions based on these stereotypes asked of them.

> **Sera:** They [White students] were like, "Ooooh. She does not look like African". Well, what in heck's an African supposed to look like? "Well, you're not that dark".

> Isn't that weird? . . . I mean, I got everything from, "Did you have a lion as a pet?" "Have you ever had an anaconda in your back yard?" Things like that. "Did your dad walk around with just a leaf, you know, in front of him?" Like seriously. "Did you have cars, real cars, like they drove around?" Yeah, I got tired of the stupid questions.

Similarly, Alex described many questions that White students asked of him about his culture as ignorant. Like Sera, he interpreted such questions as "stupid" and tiresome.

> **Alex:** When they hear I'm from Africa, their reaction turn[s] right away. You won't believe this when I tell you. The students ask me like, "Do you live in the forest with the lion?" All that stuff. I say, "Yeah we live in the forest, that big gorilla, that's my uncle". We buddy-buddy. (Laughter). They make me laugh because that's just the ignorance of the person who is asking the question. Come on! Wake up! This student, he say well he's just axing because he want to learn. I'm like, okay, "Well, it's true. We live in the forest. The big gorilla in the jungle is my uncle and my next door neighborhood is a lion". So when every time I see him I say, "What's up, lion?" He say, "What's up, gorilla?" We see each other. We know each other. We buddy-buddy. He say, "Really?" I say, "Yeah". For stupid question, stupid answer. That's all.

Throughout Alex's interviews, he routinely described feelings of exasperation regarding the ignorance White student's expressed about his culture. In an attempt to deal with this ignorance, and the stereotypes he described emanating from such ignorance, he stated he often tried to make a joke out of it. Even when he perceived the motivation for such questioning to be based on a White student's desire to learn, he often responded in a

joking manner in an attempt to stop such conversations he described as uncomfortable because these conversations were full of so many stereotypes.

Noah also described White students as ignorant of his culture and more generally the part of the world he comes from. Similar to Sera and Alex, he expressed frustration over what he perceived as the pervasiveness of this type of ignorance among students on the XYZ Community College campus.

> **Noah:** And usually when they know you're from Africa, it's like they don't want to know what part of Africa you from, they just believe Africa is a big country. "Have you seen lions before?" "Have you seen tiger before?" I'm like, "No". Where I'm from, you got to look at the zoo to see them, and I've never been to the zoo in my country. I've seen monkey, I've seen crocodile, I've seen snake, you know, but lion and elephant, uh-uh [no]. They're just like cracking jokes, you know, making fun of me. And I just sat down.

Somewhat differently from Alex, Noah describes attempting to inform the students who ask such questions. However, similar to Alex and Sera, he describes encounters with students asking these questions as isolating, in his case because he perceives these students are making a joke out of the information he provides them. In response to this, he describes disengaging and "just sitting down".

Sera's, Alex's, and Noah's examples illustrate not only the similarly isolating effect of being stereotyped, but also the different negative effects stereotypes may have, depending on the historical basis of the stereotype. It could be argued that Sera's experience of being cast as the U.S.-born Black (African American) outsider was potentially more damaging, or in her words, demoralizing, because of the legacy of racial conflict undergirding the

stereotype. Additionally, Sera's estimation of this stereotype did not appropriately apply to her, because she sees herself as African, not U.S.-born Black. In Sera's second example, and in the examples from Alex and Noah, there is little racial legacy informing the stereotype of Africans; rather, the stereotypes are based more on ignorance of the African continent than on historical racial conflict.

Similar to Sera, Alex, and Noah, Savina also reported other students asking her questions based on ignorance. Like the other African-born Blacks in this study, she reported feelings of frustration due to the "stupidity" of the questions. Savina described further frustration with the barrier of being cast as an outsider, because it involved her native African culture being misunderstood. The ignorance that Whites at XYZ Community College showed about her culture was insulting to her, and manifested itself in the expectation that her identity was representative of the entire group of Africans. She described her subsequent feelings as a form of pressure, where she had to perform for the good of her entire racial group. This apprehension about being evaluated as a model for an entire group and being personally responsible for disconfirming negative group stereotypes is commonly referred to as, "stereotype threat"(Aronson, Joshua, Carrie Fried and Catherine Good, 2002).

> **Savina:** I had one person actually asking me, 'Uh, you guys have an airport in Africa?' I'm like, okay, that's a stupid question. I don't have—did I fly here or swim through the ocean? In Africa, we know a lot about America; in America, little is known about Africa . . . I'm the only, you know, Black [in classes], and sometime it kinda put pressure on me. I feel like they're gonna judge the rest of the African people through me, so I better be good.

Although U.S.-born Blacks also experienced stereotype threat, it is important to understand that African-born Black students have a unique experience in U.S. educational institutions. It is unique because they are doubly cast as outsiders—a position to which a different set of resources applies. A more detailed discussion of how African-born Black students respond to the barrier of stereotype threat is located in this chapter's section entitled, "Dealing with the Common Barrier: Mobilizing Resources when Cast as a Racially Devalued Outsider" (see page 108).

Although the ways by which African-born Blacks distance themselves from U.S.-born Blacks was not originally a central concern of this research, this experience of distancing surfaced as a common theme among the African-born respondents. When talking about how they were separate from U.S.-born Blacks, the African-born respondents uniformly created an image of themselves that was diametrically opposed to the stereotype of the generic Black student. A prominent theme among the African Black students was to use the generic Black stereotype as a point of comparison to create an image of themselves as superior.

> **Alex:** But I can hear some comment sometime, like people make comment, you know, that gives me an opportunity to explain how I am different from other Blacks . . . for example, I remember one guy—somebody asked me one day, "So, you're African? Why every time you come here you all want to go to school?" I'm like, "Because *we know* that we have an opportunity. We *want* to progress" [Emphasis original]. I like to present myself as African because that's what I think that represents me better than being Black here [in the United States].

Alex stresses individual awareness and motivation of opportunities and a desire to improve oneself as points of differentiation between himself and U.S.-born Blacks. Similarly, Savina stresses quality of character as the main difference between herself and U.S.-born Blacks. Like the other African-born Blacks in this study, Savina described possessing the values of hard work and integrity, values she describes as inherently lacking in the U.S.-born Black population.

> **Savina:** I notice after I got here [to the United States], I kind of noticed why people think Black people don't make an effort. That's because of Black people from USA they only want to have fun; they don't try to improve themselves. They don't want to put themselves up there and they gave you [all Blacks] a bad name because of the way they've been behaving. So, I don't want to be considered like them [U.S.-born Blacks]. I would rather stay away from them. This is the reason I dress differently—I want to make a difference between me and those people. I wanna make sure that they know that I'm Black, but I'm from Africa, because I have an education, they raised me well, and I don't do drugs. I don't believe in a free pass.

Similarly, Karen, Sera and Christopher indicated their desire to make people aware that they were African-born, not U.S.-born Blacks. The African-born respondents in this study expressed a belief that they possess certain qualities that the average, stereotypical U.S.-born Black does not. By rejecting the idea that they were similar to U.S.-born Blacks in any way other than the color of their skin, they promoted the formation of a symbolic status hierarchy that elevated them above U.S.-born Blacks. The African-born respondents perceived themselves to be more similar to White students than to U.S.-born Black students.

They essentially created an in-group of African students that they position against the out-group of the generic U.S.-born Black student.

U.S.-born Blacks

The U.S.-born Black respondents in this study all expressed a perception that the color of their skin automatically placed them in a racially devalued group. Unlike the African-born respondents, the U.S.-born Black respondents did not describe a process through which they gradually became aware of a race-based hierarchy. Rather, they referred to a life-long familiarity with the historical racial hierarchy in the United States.

They also perceived their own racialized identity differently than did the African-born Black respondents. When talking about their experiences as Black students on a White campus, the U.S.-born Blacks did not attempt to present themselves as something *entirely* different than what is commonly understood as "Black" in U.S. culture. Whereas the African-born respondents perceived the formation of an in-group of Africans as a viable alternative to being forced into the devalued, out-group of U.S.-born Blacks, the U.S.-born Blacks did not. When talking about being forced into the stereotype of the generic Black student, the U.S.-born Blacks did attempt to *differentiate* themselves from that stereotype to varying degrees; however, not one described him or herself as being able to *separate* or escape entirely the stereotyped label of being U.S.-born Black.

As the section, "Research Respondents" in Chapter 3 states, this study found that, in response to the barrier of being stereotyped as an outsider, respondents described adopting one of four racial identity standpoints: *separation (used by African-born Blacks), ambivalence, alternate, or reluctant acceptance (used by U.S.-born Blacks).* These strategies

varied, depending on the level of acceptance or rejection of the stereotyped label of "the generic Black student".

The racial identity standpoints of *separation* and *ambivalence* reject the label of "generic Black student"; however, through *separation*, the African-born Blacks were able to *distance* themselves—whereas the U.S.-born Black were only able to *differentiate* themselves from the stereotype of the generic Black student through *ambivalence*. The *alternate* standpoint substitutes Black consciousness for the stereotype, and the strategy of *reluctant acceptance* internalizes this stereotype. The findings of this study indicate that U.S.-born Black students experience the stereotype of the generic Black student in three different ways: *ambivalence, alternate,* and *reluctant acceptance*.

First, some U.S.-born Black students described being trapped by the stereotype of, and therefore seeing themselves in terms somewhat similar to, the generic Black student. I term this racial identity standpoint as *reluctant acceptance* of the stereotype of the generic Black student. This group of Black students described themselves as being least capable of escaping the stereotype of the generic Black student, relative to the other U.S.-born Black respondents.

Second, some of the respondents focused on ways they might moderate the alienating effects of the stereotype by asserting an *alternate* type of positive Black identity standpoint. These respondents talked about being frustrated with being stereotyped as a generic Black student by the Whites at XYZ Community College, but described how their understanding of White culture and Black culture allowed them to navigate the barrier of this stereotype somewhat successfully. This racial identity standpoint is one in which U.S.-born Blacks substituted an *alternate* Black consciousness for the stereotype of the generic Black.

Finally, some students experienced the stereotype of the generic Black student as being both alienating and inaccurately applied to them. These students focused on how they were unfairly categorized as Black because of their mixed race heritage. The respondents engaged in this type of differentiation from the stereotype of the generic Black student, focused on the importance of individual academic abilities, and therefore discounted the effect skin color should have on academic achievement. This third racial identity standpoint is *ambivalence*.

This section briefly discusses how each of these three groups of U.S.-born Black students report experiencing the stereotype of the generic Black student. Later, the chapter focuses on discussing the resources each of these groups perceives themselves as being able to utilize when dealing with this common barrier.

Experiencing the Stereotype of the Generic Black Student from the Racial Identity Standpoint of **Reluctant Acceptance**

Aliyah and Darryl represent this first group of U.S.-born Black respondents who perceive themselves as least able to differentiate themselves from the stereotype of the generic Black student and its alienating effects. Aliyah exhibits fear and trepidation of being exposed as “dumb” by the Whites who outnumber her in classes. When confronted with being cast in the stereotype of the generic Black student, she reacts with anger.

> **Aliyah:** When you get into the classroom you might be the only African American in there so, for one, I like being by myself because, I swear to God, like everybody else is so much smarter than me. I am just dumb! This White girl one time was like "you are Black and you are so loud". I was like, if I was White, I would be loud! I almost whipped her ass because of her statement.

Similar to Aliyah, Darryl describes that being cast as an undesirable racial outsider prompts his anger over how it "sucks" to be surrounded by Whites who, he perceives, don't want him around.

> **Darryl:** It sucks [being with all these Whites]. It sucks. I don't know if I can look at you, I'm crazy! I've been telling my friend, they [Whites] don't want you around. What are you doing here? That's what I get somehow. But I don't care. But I would love to see more Black people here if it was possible. Being in classes with a bunch of White kids and a White teacher, well, it's like lots of pain pills!

Similar to Aliyah's description of being stereotyped as Black and loud, Darryl describes being stereotyped as a racial outsider as uncomfortable, even painful, and beyond his capabilities to change. The anger expressed by Aliyah and Darryl appears to result from feeling unwanted, and being unable to distance themselves from this stereotype.

Experiencing the Stereotype of the Generic Black Student from an **Alternate** *Racial Identity Standpoint*

The second group of U.S.-born Black students also talked about the alienating effects of being stereotyped as generic Black students. Unlike the first group, they discursively differentiated themselves from this stereotype by asserting an alternate definition of Blackness: a type of conscious Black identity. Raven, Trina, Tyler, Jamal, William, Joseph, Robert, and Nikki provide examples of this type of positioning away from the stereotype of the generic Black by referencing an alternate type of Black identity.

In the following excerpt, Nikki comments on how her difference is made visible to her when White students ask her "stupid stuff". In essence, she describes the way in which stereotypes uncomfortably cast her as an outsider. In response to the discomfort, she

maintains control over how Blackness is defined for her, thus enabling her to deflect some of the negative aspects of the stereotype of the generic Black.

> **Nikki:** Everybody just looks at you different. Yeah, I'm aware [of being Black] because they [Whites] remind you. People ax[sk] you stupid stuff like "why do Black people kill?" Where does it come from? Maybe you watch too much TV. Sometimes you feel out of place not only because there are not many [Black students], but because the few that are here are someplace else. There's not really anybody to, you know, be comrades, with I guess. So [I feel] out of place . . . Well, you know, really, I mean again, this is a White school so you have to be careful, you can't go around willy-nilly, you don't want to say or come off wrong or too brass or too strong or say the wrong thing because White people may say, "Oh, that's the Black thing" . . . But you do need to remember who you are, that you are Black.

The U.S.-born Black respondents in this second group each report being aware of being viewed as a token or model by which other Black students are evaluated. The findings of this study reveal that two groups of Black respondents mention dealing with the stereotype threat; African-born Blacks and this group of U.S.-born Blacks, who are situated in an *alternate* racial identity standpoint. Stereotype threat undermines academic achievement, because it produces an anxiety-ridden environment in which to perform (Blanton et al. 2000). Tyler's and William's responses show that this anxiety is based on the desire to perform well enough to disprove the negative implications of the stereotype of the generic Black student:

> **Tyler:** It's [this college] predominantly White, so to me having fewer Blacks on campus motivates <u>me</u> more to succeed, because I know, based off of experience, that my classmates think that I shouldn't be at their level and when they find out that I am,

> that's surprising to them, and sometimes it's infuriating to them, which in turn motivates me and lets me know that I'm doing the right thing. Being the only Black student in there, it's as if all eyes are on me [as the token Black].

Similar to Tyler, William describes feeling in the spotlight. Because of the stereotype of the generic Black student and because he is an extreme numeric racial minority on campus, his performance is used to inform White's overall perception of Blacks. He describes White students as escaping this type of pressure because it is "normal" to expect academic success from them; however, solely based on his race, he has to deal with pressure to perform.

> **William:** White people in school, it's not, they're not expected to fail or succeed, it's just that they go to school; they're smart enough to graduate from college and then go on. But I feel like Black people in school are looked at as can they do it? . . . It is like our success or lack of success sets the tone of how all Blacks are viewed . . . And there's a difference between wondering if they [Blacks] can do it and hoping they [Blacks] can do it versus a [White] person that, well, it's just normal that you go to school, it doesn't cross your mind.

Because of stereotype threat, regardless of whether Black students identify with the threatened domain of student and attempt to disprove the stereotype of the generic Black student, or whether the student disengages, they operate under academic conditions, that are, in this sense, more adverse than the average White student.

Experiencing the Stereotype of the Generic Black Student from the Racial Identity Standpoint of **Ambivalence**

The third group of U.S.-born Black students in this study also discursively

differentiated themselves from the stereotype of the generic Black student, but rather than replace the stereotype with a type of conscious Black identity, they tried to minimize associations with being categorized as Black. The students in this group all self-identified as having mixed-race heritage. Regardless of their mixed-race identity, they realized they were perceived as Black by others around them. This group clarified that being automatically categorized as Black was a frustrating and negative experience. In response, they attempted to increase their level of distinctiveness from Blacks by emphasizing their similarity to White students, or by emphasizing such non-race-based characteristics as personal educational achievement. Joshua, Andre, Tora, and Jazmin all described their experiences navigating the predominantly White system of XYZ Community College from the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence*—specifically, ambivalence toward the negative stereotype of the generic Black student.

For example, Tora's perceptions of her difference from White students were analogous to being "a chocolate chip in milk". Tora experienced how being cast as Black made her race visible in an uncomfortable way. In response, she attempted to situate herself as non-Black by stereotyping others whom she interpreted to be more Black than she. In addition, she attempted to distance herself from the negative stereotypes applied to Blacks by defining herself as "in-between" races, and as fitting in with Whites:

> **Tora**: On campus, I feel like I was put into a bowl of cereal, and I'm a chocolate chip. Well, you just feel kind of like you kind of stick out like a sore thumb. It's kind of (pause) . . . That's kinda what I meant. In all my classes here I'm pretty much minority in mostly all of them, so I'm different . . . I'm kind of mixed—but in other situations, I'm Black, because there's been times, you know, they [Whites] check off

> your race, I mean, they've never even asked me, I'm just always Black, they just check off black. Sometimes, I've gotten really angry. I'm Black? You know, I am, but that's not [entirely accurate], I'd never check just that . . . I'm kind of mixed up because I am Indian, but people see me as Black, and I don't really like some Black people. You don't see many people up here that's scruffy and dirty. I just see myself as in-between, and able to get along with Whites. I mean, I love white people.

When talking about the dilemma of being mixed race, yet categorized by others as being exclusively Black, Andre, similar to Tora, attempted to differentiate himself from the negative stereotype of being Black. Rather than stereotyping other Blacks in an attempt to distance himself from such stereotypes, Andre minimized race as playing a part in inequalities:

> **Andre:** Generally, in this school, I think a lot of people just think I'm Black, they stereotype me as you know, just *Black.* Sometimes, that *annoys* me, you know what I'm saying? Because it's like, I'm *half* White, you know, *half*, you know, I'm not just Black, you know? Why does it [being classified as Black] annoy me? Because I'm not Black . . . People think being Black means being a thug. Just like the Black side of my family. I have a White side too . . . I'm, I mean, why can't you just call me White? You know, why not just White, you know? I'm just as much White as I am Black. I'm not just *Black*, you know what I'm saying? But no matter what, I'm going to *be* Black, you know?

Similar to Tora and Andre, Jazmin and Joshua have light skin, and describe their light skin as placing them in the different category of, "mixed race", rather than the racial category of Black—to which they feel Whites automatically assign them. This group of students

provides examples of how students with the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence* feel unfairly categorized into a racial and undervalued out-group, but who attempt to deal with this by de-emphasizing their belongingness to the racial category of Blacks. Students in this category focus more specifically on how individual opportunities are more meaningful in their educational success than race.

Summary

U.S.-born and African-born Black students in this study unanimously report perceiving that others have stereotyped then as “generic Black students”. A major consequence of being stereotyped as the generic Black student is being thrust into the status of an outsider. The potential harm of being cast as a racial outsider is that a person’s identity becomes a reflection where, in this case, his or her blackness is an image “refracted through” a dominant mirror—in this case, the (White) normative identity (Ferguson 2001:209). This filtered identity is often wrought with distortions and harmful misrepresentations of what Blackness really is. Being thrust into the stereotype of the generic Black student, and therefore into a racially based and stigmatized outsider status, is a common barrier to the process of education shared by all respondents in this study.

African-born respondents discuss perceiving themselves as being different from U.S.-born Blacks. They therefore create opportunities to escape the stereotype of the generic Black student by presenting an alternate Black persona of African Black, via the racial identity standpoint of *separation*. Unlike African-born Blacks, U.S.-born Blacks in this study perceive opportunities to separate, to a degree, from the stereotype, but not to escape it entirely.

The U.S.-born Black respondents who operated from the racial identity standpoint of *reluctant acceptance* reported feeling most trapped by the stereotype of the generic Black student, and least able to separate from the negative connotations associated with it. The second group of U.S.-born Black respondents discursively differentiated themselves from the stereotype of the generic Black student by asserting an *alternate* "conscious" Black identity standpoint. The third group of U.S.-born Black respondents differentiated themselves from the stereotype of the generic Black student by presenting themselves as being mixed-race and *ambivalent* to the effect of race in education—instead, focusing on the value of individual effort.

Dealing with the Common Barrier: Mobilizing Resources when Cast as a Racially Devalued Outsider

Does their racialized status make Black students aware of the unique challenges they face with regard to being in control of their educational trajectories? If so, what resources do they use to succeed in their learning in the face such adverse circumstances? For the purpose of this study, *resources* refer to capacities that allow people and/or groups to accomplish things through resistance, achievement, or maintenance.

The most prominent barrier to the respondents' ability to access the processes of education in ways equal to Whites was by having the stereotype of the generic Black student applied to them. The respondents were unanimous in this observation. In response to this barrier, the respondents identified several resources that allowed them to navigate the college's educational system. While some similarities existed among all of the respondents, how they defined, accessed, and utilized resources varied. These differences occurred

between African-born Blacks and U.S.-born Blacks, and also within the three distinct groups of U.S.-born Blacks.

African-born Blacks

African-born respondents talked about becoming aware of the meaning of being Black as it related to the particular historical meaning of Blackness in the United States. Upon understanding what it means to be Black in the United States, the African-born students discursively set themselves apart, positioning themselves as outsiders—not from the dominant White society, but as distinct outsiders from the category of being U.S.-born Black. The resources utilized by African-born Blacks allowed them to adhere to the racial identity standpoint of *separation*, whereby they distanced themselves from other Black students.

Mobilizing resources from a racial identity standpoint of **separation**.

The resources employed by the African-born respondents in this study included using their European accent to distance themselves from U.S.-born Blacks. Additionally, these respondents referenced their own struggles in their African countries as evidence that they were able individually to persevere against the same "odds of racism" as portrayed by U.S.-born Blacks. Their "outsider" understanding of the split White and Black culture in the United States provided a foundation upon which they discursively distanced themselves from U.S.-born Blacks. In this way, their outsider-within status, as defined below, served as a resource for them.

Being cognizant of being an outsider in the midst of the social milieu of a dominant group is commonly referred to as inhabiting an outsider-within status (Hill Collins 1986). The ability to inhabit this status functions as a resource, because it enables groups outside the mainstream (in this case, African-born Blacks) to have an objective, clear understanding of

the workings of dominant and subordinate groups. While this term is most commonly applied to U.S.-born Blacks who are able to clearly understand the day-to-day realities of the racially privileged versus oppressed, a slight variation of this concept can also be applied to the realities of African-born Blacks.

African-born respondents describe possessing a slightly different type of outsider-within status than what was originally intended by Patricia Hill Collins. Despite seeing themselves as being different from U.S.-born Blacks, African-born respondents acknowledge that because of skin color, the dominant White culture perceives them as similar to U.S.-born Blacks. For these African respondents, this outsider-within status enables them to make sense of the marginalized status into which they were thrust. They describe their understanding of being outside the historical racial classification schemes in the United States. At the same time, they describe being trapped in them because of their skin color. They describe this aspect of being more removed from the historical underpinnings of racial categorization as providing them with an ability to see and reject what they describe as the victim status that traps U.S.-born Blacks. In essence, their ability to remain connected to their African identity serves as a main source of efficacy. Sera and Amelia (African-born Blacks) provide examples of how their unique racial positions as Africans provide them with an ability to inhabit the outsider-within status, and which undergirds their sense of efficacy:

> **Sera:** To me, African American they've been through a lot of struggles. They've been through an awful lot, and some of them use that as crutches not to move on, and feel like they need to be reimbursed or rewarded . . . not rewarded . . . but somebody owes them something, like reparation. Somebody needs to pay back for whatever has happened. And I feel to those African Americans, [pause] I don't know how to

> respect them. I can't respect them cause, I mean, we all go through struggles in life, whether white, Black, Puerto Rican, whatever, we go through struggles in life, and for you to have a crutch, or to feel like somebody else owes you so you can get ahead, it's just selfish, and it's lazy, and I hate lazy. With me, seeing lazy African Americans pushes me to prove you [Whites] wrong. I mean, if I work harder, I'll eventually attain what I want.

Although Sera perceives U.S.-born Blacks as having a history of oppression, she also perceives it as a historical, not contemporary condition. Therefore, she sees little or no connection between the historical condition of slavery and what she describes as modern day "laziness". Similar to Sera, Amelia refers to the current situation of disadvantage that U.S.-born Blacks are in as a result of them choosing to position themselves in a victim status.

> **Amelia:** I think African Americans supposed to stop blaming the system or blaming other people for themselves. I think it's time for them to get up, go earn a degree and become somebody and stop the blame. I mean it's ridiculous. I mean, you wanna have a decent job? Go get it. You know, you can get a decent job if you want to. But you cannot get it unless you go to school. You know? Find a different road to make yourself successful. I don't know. I think my motivation is about coming from Africa, and I came in and this country is *full* of opportunities [emphasis original]. And I'm like, wow, I want to go after them. So, then when you see the people from here, being born and raised here, they [African Americans] not doing anything.

Both Sera and Amelia acknowledge that the color of their skin potentially threatens to place them in the same racial category as U.S.-born Blacks. Additionally, both discuss how this understanding helps them to perceive themselves and to portray themselves as different

from U.S.-born Blacks based on their African heritage and what they describe as superior motivation to make a better life for themselves.

Additionally, many African-born Blacks view their European language as a resource that allows them to present themselves as separate from U.S.-born Blacks. Their European accents assisted in the construction of an identity which distanced them from U.S.-born Blacks. For example, when talking about setting himself apart from U.S.-born Blacks, Alex recognizes the function his French accent serves. In referencing the generic U.S.-born Black stereotype, he discursively positions himself as separate from them by stating U.S.-born Blacks, unlike African-born Blacks, are always blaming racism for their subordinate position. His language allows him to portray himself as accepted by Whites, therefore creating a distance between himself and U.S.-born Blacks:

> **Alex:** For example, me, I'm Black. Okay, every time people see me, they tell me I look like an African American. Really? But I'm African. I'm tall and maybe I'm big—I want to lose weight—but they say I'm big, so I look like African Americans sometime. But as soon as I start speaking, they know I'm not from here. So the first question is, "Where you from?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm from Africa". "Oh, yeah?" Okay I've got two reactions from that situation. If the person was White for example, if I say I'm from Africa, 95% of the time, he want to know more. He say, "Okay. You are? What part of Africa?" He start a conversation, he want to know more. "Yeah how long you been here?" "What brought you here?" "Okay, you like it here?" You know, and so and so, oh wow, wow, that's amazing, you know? Okay. That was a kind of positive reaction. But is not a positive reaction if person is African American. Cause when I say I'm from Africa, they say, "Oh yeah? What you doing here!!?" But

> that's okay, I don't want to be African American. I don't respect that. My accent helps me in that way. Racially, I'm a– I call myself a Black African in America. Not African American, that's different. They always blaming the racism for their bad situation. But this place [United States] is no different from any other place I would be. And here you get what you put into it. If you put yourself into it seriously, you will get what you trying hard for, just like me. If you try hard, you'll get what you want.

When talking about what helps to distance her from U.S.-born Blacks, Amelia, similar to Alex, also discusses the function her accent plays. In her conversation with a White student at XYZ Community College, Amelia gains an understanding of how Whites see the generic Black in the United States: as negative and threatening. Using her accent as a resource, Amelia is able to position herself in contrast to the generic Black stereotype:

> **Amelia:** This [White] person at school told me she really thought at the beginning I was, um, African-American. But when I start opening my mouth—all this time, this lady thought I was African-American. And then, she picked up that I wasn't from there. She was like, where are you from? I'm like, I'm from the Congo. She goes, I can tell—your accent! She goes, you know, I came from the south, um, African-Americans are kind of, she goes Black people from this country, they not like you guys from Africa. Because you– I'm like why?, because I wanted to know what she knows. And she goes, I used to have a friend, she's from Africa, she's completely different. Very respectful, very– but, there are Black people from here—we're scared of them. And she said 'we'– she's talking in general, you know? So, this is why I like my accent, it separates me from them [U.S.-born Blacks].

Similarly, Christopher, Noah, Savina, and Karen discursively position themselves outside of what they perceive to be the quagmire of a victim identity within which they assert most U.S.-born Blacks stay mired. By positioning themselves as outsiders relative to U.S.-born Blacks, the Africans in this study describe drawing upon their own histories of overcoming struggles in their countries of origin, their European language, and upon the knowledge they gain via inhabiting an outsider-within status, as their main resources.

U.S.-born Blacks

How do U.S.-born Black respondents position themselves relative to the stereotype of the generic Black student? What resources do U.S.-born Blacks utilize in an attempt to deal with the barrier of being cast into the stereotype of the generic Black student?

As described in the previous section, "Perceiving and Experiencing the Common Barrier", there are three main types of racial identity standpoints from which U.S.-born Blacks position themselves when dealing with the stereotype of the generic Black student. In this research, these three types of racial identity standpoints take the form of *reluctant acceptance* with, *alternate* from, and *ambivalence* towards the stereotype of the generic Black student. In addition to positioning themselves in one of these types of racial identity when dealing with the stereotype, the way in which these U.S.-born Black respondents recognize and mobilize resources vary by type of racial identity standpoint.

Mobilizing resources from a racial identity standpoint of **reluctant acceptance**.

Two of the U.S.-born Black respondents in this study (Darryl and Aliyah) talked about the stereotype of the generic Black student as being a barrier that entraps them. More than the other groups of respondents, these two students tended to accept the devalued definition applied to them by this stereotype.

Of all of the respondents, they were least able to discuss ways in which they perceived they were capable of accomplishing things in spite of this barrier. These two respondents expressed dislike and even anger at being categorized into a devalued racial group, but were unable to provide clear examples of using resources to achieve access to the processes of learning at XYZ Community College. Resources, for these two students, were defined only in terms of capacities that enabled them to exist and perhaps maintain their student status at the college, rather than capacities that allowed for achievement. For these two students, resources consisted of inhabiting a weak variation of the outsider-within status, of engaging in a type of "othering" of dominants, and of perceiving themselves as possessing such individual qualities as persistence.

Darryl and Aliyah described awareness that, because of their marginalized Black status, they knew more about Whites on campus than Whites know about them. However, even though both Darryl and Aliyah perceive themselves as such, or perhaps more than Whites are of themselves, this perception did not equate to inhabiting the position of the outsider-within. Darryl and Aliyah remained mired in negative emotional reactions to the externally imposed stereotype that they perceived as entrapping them.

For the outsider-within status to truly function as a resource, Black students need to be able to use the knowledge generated from this status to supplant the externally defined controlling image of race imposed upon them, with their own definition (Hill Collins 1986). Two other groups of Black respondents accomplished this via the mobilization of the racial identity standpoints of *separation* and *alternate.* African-born respondents separated themselves from the generic Black stereotype by presenting themselves as a type of "Black European", and U.S.-born Blacks who operated from the standpoint of an *alternate* racial

identity supplanted the White defined generic Black identity with a Black defined "conscious" identity.

The type of identity work that results in being able to supplant externally defined and controlling images of who one is requires objectivity and clarity of understanding regarding both the dominant and subordinate cultures. Darryl and Aliyah stopped short of possessing a full enough understanding of objectively inhabiting a dualistic racial identity to use this knowledge to contest the dominant (White) system of learning at the college. Rather, they tended to get "stuck" in the frustration of not being understood.

The following quote from Darryl illustrates his occupation of a weak type of outsider-within status, one which translates only marginally into a resource for him. It does provide him with an awareness of being in a "different" position than Whites because of race, but it does not turn this awareness into a pathway though which to navigate this difference:

> **Darryl:** I get it, I do. It's White here . . . It kind of makes you feel uncomfortable, a little bit. If you think about it . . . Why is it that I know your culture and you're White, but you don't know my culture and I'm Black?

Another resource used by Darryl to resist his subordinate status is a type of cognitive strategy of "othering" dominants (that is, Whites). Day-to-day interactions that reinforce the "dramaturgical fronts" of those who are dominant uphold the unequal power distribution (Schwalbe 2000). Conversely, the ability to enact strategies aimed at exposing these fronts as false serves as a resource to resist subordination. By talking about a Black History Month celebration as a charade put on by ignorant White "crackers", he recasts White dominants as ignorant, therefore calling into question the legitimacy of their definitions of what it means to be Black:

> **Darryl:** Ohm, yeah, Black History Month. Wow, we Black! We Black! I'm Black 24 hours 7 days a week 365 days a year. So you don't need to teach me about Black History. I live it every day. Every day, oh Black History Month, how you doing, buddy? We go on dealing with these crackers. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. They're lost [Whites]. You can just walk out here and see. There's a lot of students. If you ask a White girl, where you from, she won't be able to tell you, we from Iowa. It goes deeper than that. The majority of [White] people they don't know anything.

By calling into question the legitimacy of White knowledge, Darryl may make day-to-day life more bearable for himself. However, the mobilization of this type of "othering" dominants, as a resource, does little to disrupt the larger patterns of interaction upon which inequalities are replicated (Schwalbe 2001).

Aliyah also provides an example of attempting to use an individual quality as a resource. When Aliyah talks about being cast as a token Black, she describes the pressure of stereotype threat, but also attempts to portray this kind of situation as being motivational:

> **Aliyah:** I just want– it is like I push myself because I am like you are the only minority in here. You have to prove a point. There are some things you have to prove. You have to show these people that you are not dumb. Well I am a spokesperson. Any minority is. Because some of the White kids in there look at like you like "for real you are going to Community College?" It is easy as hell, we have come from a real college and we are only here because we have to get this little credit.

For Aliyah, her ability to persist at XYZ Community College may serve as a resource. However, if the stereotype threat proves too great, she may opt to disengage from the domain in which the stereotype is most present.

The resources identified by Darryl and Aliyah are only marginally helpful to them. Both Darryl's "othering" of dominants and Aliyah's persistence operate at an individual level. Coupled with the lack of clear, objective understanding of the outsider-within status, they are able to accomplish little in the way of addressing the structure upon which patterns of inequality occur.

Mobilizing resources from an **alternate** racial identity standpoint.

The respondents who describe themselves as having an *alternate* racial identity standpoint also describe being able to access and mobilize the most resources of all three groups of U.S.-born Blacks. These resources include the ability to inhabit a state of double consciousness, knowledge of an outsider-within status, and feelings of efficacy.

As a precursor to contemporary theorizing on the multiplicity and dualistic nature of identities, Du Bois (1903/1989) described Blacks in the United States as possessing a sort of liminal awareness of the different social rules under which Blacks and Whites operate. Du Bois refers to this type of liminal awareness as double consciousness. Historically, double consciousness has operated as a survival mechanism for Blacks. Prior to *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education,* Black U.S. citizens survived by incorporating this awareness of differential social rules into personal practices that enabled them to avoid race-based penalties. The concept of double consciousness evolved out of thinking about how Blacks navigated within society when, historically, Blacks and Whites were separate.

After *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education,* this double consciousness evolved from a liminal awareness to more of a conscious understanding of the two, sometimes opposing, realities of Whites and Blacks. Although both types of dualistic racial awareness (double consciousness and the outsider-within status) have provided a platform upon which

Blacks evaluate their status and available pathways in White society, the outsider-within status has been more of a social critique of race in society than the more survival-based liminal awareness of double consciousness.

The importance of understanding double consciousness as it relates to this study is twofold. First, the concept of double consciousness is a precursor to the more contemporary way of conceptualizing the type of split racial consciousness, known as the outsider-within status. Second, double consciousness and its contemporary concept, the outsider-within standpoint, are the main resources upon which the strategies of code-switching and restraint are based. A further discussion of the strategies of code-switching and restraint is found in Chapter 5.

The outsider-within status provides a unique standpoint that enables its inhabitants to understand both the reality of the privileged and of the oppressed. This type of objectivity allows people who are different and marginalized (like Black students at a White college) to see patterns of action of the majority more clearly than do majority members (that is, White students). Being cognizant of being an outsider in the midst of the social milieu of a dominant group can be a resource if this understanding illuminates pathways to navigate the dominant social order (Hill Collins 1986). The respondents in this category describe the process of navigating the pathway as “playing the game”.

The respondents who occupy an *alternate* racial identity standpoint recognize they are cast as marginalized racial outsiders, but differ from the respondents whose racial identity standpoint is either *reluctantly accepted* or *ambivalent* to the stereotype of the generic Black, in that they describe their Black identity—while stigmatized—as a source of strength. They describe the process of inhabiting the position of the “other” as providing a vantage point for

understanding how best to navigate a system they are not part of, and at the same time remain attached to their Blackness. In essence, their Black identity provides them with a source of strength to persevere at the college by believing they can "play the game" without sacrificing their racial identity.

Tyler and Jamal describe using their knowledge of White culture (outsider-within status) and White ways of doing, being, and acting to help them navigate the system of learning at the college. Tyler refers to "the game" as a type of discourse and presentation-of-self congruent with dominant (White) culture. He consciously chooses to "play the game", while at the same time "maintains his blackness" in an effort to achieve an education:

> **Tyler:** I know how to play the game, and they [Whites at the college] know that. What I mean by that is that by going on those [college sponsored] trips, I knew that I should probably wear suits and be well-groomed, and things like that, and I think that the administration picked me because they probably assumed that I wouldn't be an embarrassment to the college. I guess I'll steal a term from Michael Eric Dyson; I don't want to become part of the Afrostocracy of where I get my education. What keeps me maintaining my Blackness, if you will, is not assimilating to what White people do in order to succeed, but only sometimes dressing how they dress, and sometimes how they talk, or things like that. This allows me to challenge the status quo by my superiority to them in their own game of education.

Similar to Tyler, Jamal describes how occupying the outsider-within status provides him with an understanding of the White culture that is necessary for him to navigate White institutions in order to "make it in this world". Consistent with this type of racial identity standpoint, Jamal is clear that maintaining a firm sense of Blackness and not denying his

racial identity is necessary to maintain a balance between *knowing* White culture and *remaining* Black:

> **Jamal:** I don't have a problem with learning a curriculum that's basically slanted toward the Whites. It opens my mind up to what's going on because the reality of it is that the justice system, the political system, all of these systems in America are predominantly White, and were instituted by predominantly White people. So in order to live and survive in this society, you have to understand and have knowledge about these systems. But it is also important to not deny who I am and learn a little more about who I am in this world. So I think that there's a balance. You know? So yeah, you have to understand, and what was that song? They say you have to learn your enemy. You cannot sit back and be ignorant. You have to learn.

Tyler and Jamal are representative of the perspective shared by Robert, Raven, Nikki, Trina, and William, who also mobilize resources to deal with the stereotype of the generic Black from an *alternate* racial identity standpoint. These respondents clearly perceive the existence of two unequal racial statuses at the college: White and Black. They describe how their individual success is dependent on possessing a clear understanding of the White system. Different from Black students who attempt to *become part of* the White system (that is, to pass as White), these Black students describe knowledge of the White system as a resource—something to be used to their advantage while simultaneously maintaining a sense of Blackness.

Joseph, another respondent in this category, uses knowledge produced by his outsider-within status consciously to position himself contrary to stereotypes. This variation on "playing the game" uses shock value to lift the stereotype of the generic Black student

temporarily. Similar to Tyler and Jamal, Joseph uses the knowledge of the "dominant other" to inform his behavioral choices while maintaining his Black identity, but different from the examples given by Tyler and Jamal. Joseph consciously portrays himself in unpredictable ways to "stir things up":

> **Joseph:** When people look at me, I'm something unconventional. [Pause] Sometimes, I have fun with it, like I have many different styles. I have many different looks, and sometimes I dress a certain way just to get a certain reaction, to see if I <u>can</u> get a reaction. If I'm curious enough. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. If I were to come in one day just wearing, you know, jersey and sneakers, you know jeans, whatever, and I like to do acts with my hats, but if I just wore it to, you know, I'd probably get the typical like, "Oh, another gangster," whatever. But the very next day or the same day I'd come in wearing slacks and sweater, I might get, you know, it will still be mixed responses, like kinda shock, like you know . . . One way I think about it is, well, if you want a certain amount of respect and people to take you seriously, you know, it's like you're going to have to tone that down a bit until society is ready to see Black style in a better image. I dress in many different styles. And that trips up some people. It disrupts their stereotype, I think. So they can't label me. They don't know who I am.

Black respondents who perceive themselves most able to navigate the White environment describe being critically aware of their outsider-within status. They describe possessing the confidence and ability to be creative, such that they use this understanding of White reality while simultaneously maintaining a sense of their Black identity to navigate the system and persist at the college.

Mobilizing resources from a racial identity standpoint of **ambivalence**.

The respondents of this study who positioned themselves as *ambivalent* to the stereotype of the generic Black student tended to deny the relevance of race-based categories. Somewhat contradictorily, the four U.S.-born Black respondents who were *ambivalent*, and questioned the validity of race-based categorizations, also described being aware of the stereotype and its attendant negative effects. However, instead of substituting an *alternate* "conscious" Black identity as a way to remove themselves from these negative connotations, or *reluctantly accepting* the stereotype, these respondents attempted to differentiate themselves from the racial category of Black. Black student respondents situated in a racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence* did this in two ways: first, in an attempt to deny the relevance of racial categories, they presented individual effort and merit as markers of distinction, rather than race; second, they discussed as useful resources physical characteristics that de-emphasized their Blackness or allowed them to pass for white.

Jazmin discussed how she does not feel the racial category of Black applies to her. She referenced her individual achievement (honor society member) as an example of how racial classifications have not hindered her achievement, and that they were, therefore, somewhat irrelevant to her:

> **Jazmin:** I'm Black, I mean. You can see that and I can see it. But, um, I don't think it's something that should be pointed out. I'm in the honor society and do fine in classes . . . I mean, I'm still a person like you are . . . like you said, I'm part of it (the Black group), but not really. I really don't think I am. I feel like– [chuckling] it's (racial classification) not gonna affect me . . . so why bother with it?

Whereas Jazmin referenced individual achievement as evidence that race does not determine student success, Andre discussed how he could physically present himself as White, and expressed the belief that if one does not look for race-based differences, then none exist.

> **Andre:** I'm not aware of any issues of race, even *if* [emphasis original] there was a certain texture in their [Whites] voice where they would be like, kind of like demeaning, you know? . . . I probably wouldn't even catch it, because I'm not looking for that, you know? I'm not thinking about that. I don't notice color. I don't even know if there are minorities in my class. I mean, if I put my hat on [he demonstrates], if you can't see my hair, I look white.

The U.S.-born Black respondents situated in this type of racial identity tended to distance themselves from the social category of being fully Black by presenting themselves as being racially mixed. All of the respondents in this category (Andre, Jazmin, Tora, and Joshua) possessed light skin, and voluntarily discussed their mixed-race heritage. Although they were aware that Whites classify them as Black, and that they have Black heritage, their Blackness did not serve as a location of racial identity powerful enough to contest the negative connotations that, in their perception, Whites attach to U.S.-born Blacks. Thus, they tended to embrace the idea that being less Black, or attempting to fit into White ways of doing and being, was most advantageous to them. Therefore, the most useful resources available to these respondents were individual effort, merit, and the physical characteristics they possessed that prevented them from being classified as being fully Black.

Different from the African-born respondents who were able to separate themselves from the category of being U.S.-born Black, this group was not able to entirely disconnect

from this racial classification. For this group of U.S.-born Blacks, the main resources utilized to avoid the application of the stereotype of the generic Black student were those characteristics that allowed them to try to pass as White.

Chapter Summary

Previous research identifies various negative consequences for students of color who attend predominantly White colleges imbued with colorblind culture (Solorzano et al. 2000; Adams 2005; Smith et al. 2007). McIntosh (1988) describes Whites in such institutions as carrying around an invisible knapsack of privileges related to their dominant racial status, one which allows them to see themselves as congruent with the curriculum, classroom, and general college culture. Conversely, students of color at these types of institutions see few others on campus who look like them. Additionally, students who are non-normative and non-dominant encounter faculty with whom, and curriculum with which, they cannot identify. This situation of separation is equated with being defined as the marginalized "other" (McIntosh 1988).

Being cast as the devalued racial outsider via the application of the stereotype of the generic Black student was the common barrier reported by all of this study's respondents. Social psychological research and theory explain that the ability to define, control, and direct the path and essence of one's life course is the basis of humanness (Bandura` 2001). Being a Black student at a predominantly White and colorblind college that is not only imbued with the invisible privilege of Whiteness, but also which rests on codes of meritocracy, is to be covertly defined negatively as an "other". The status of being defined as the negative or undesirable "other" is essentially to be stripped of authority, objectified, and positioned as

"less" than the normative White student. Therefore, inhabiting a marginalized outsider status as a Black student presents unique challenges to the ability to see oneself as efficacious.

The respondents in this study used various resources when faced with the barrier of being an outsider. Common among the African-born Black respondents was the belief that they were inaccurately categorized as being similar to U.S.-born blacks by a White culture steeped in historical racism. Because their relatively removed status as African allowed for a clear understanding of their position as outsiders-within, they used this knowledge, as well as their European language accent, to position themselves discursively as *separate*—and most often as superior to U.S.-born Blacks.

The U.S.-born Blacks most able to navigate the system of learning at XYZ Community College functioned from a racial identity standpoint, which substituted an *alternate*, "conscious", Black identity for the stereotyped racial identity of the generic Black student. These students described having a strong sense of the outsider-within, which manifested itself in double consciousness. This perspective enabled them to navigate the White educational system and simultaneously maintain a strong sense of Black identity.

The U.S.-born Blacks who described the greatest difficulty seeing themselves as efficacious were those who were least defined in terms of an absolute racial identity. These students positioned themselves as being *ambivalent* toward the stereotype of the generic Black student, or *reluctantly accepted* the stereotype. The students who were *ambivalent* tended to describe themselves in multi-racial terms, rejecting the White-imposed stereotype of the generic Black student, but simultaneously lacked a clear racial identity of any kind to which they attached themselves.

Overall, the main barrier to equitable access to the processes of learning at the college, as described unanimously among respondents, was that of being cast as an outsider. The resources employed to navigate this barrier included a strong sense of occupying the outsider-within status, operation within a state of double consciousness, and possession of a sense of personal efficacy. The mobilization of these resources varied depending on the assessment of potential outcomes and the source of the respondent's racial identity standpoint.

CHAPTER 5. STRATEGIES OF RACIAL ADAPTATION

A great deal of social psychology research has centered on the interpersonal dynamics of occupying an outsider status (Hogg 2003; Tijfel and Turner 1986; Schwalbe et al. 2000). The existence of subordinated outsiders depends on the existence of a group of dominant insiders. In this study, Black students at the predominantly White XYZ Community College represented the group of outsiders, and the White college students and employees represented the insiders. As discussed in Chapter 4, Black students in this study reported experiencing negative consequences of being cast as outsiders to differing degrees, and of responding with different coping strategies. Each respondent, however, was keenly aware of being assigned an outsider status based on the highly visible attribute of race.

Broadly, group membership is an important social activity for establishing a positive sense of self and providing necessary feedback and information regarding who one is. Because of being forced into the negative stereotype of the generic Black student, Black students on predominantly White campuses often struggle with group membership. Because of the visible marker of skin color difference, they commonly have trouble permeating the group boundaries of White group membership. In addition, Black students are sometimes unable to form viable same-race groups, because of the lack of critical mass of Blacks on campus. In this study, participants describe this struggle for membership and identity cues as resulting in additional barriers to accessing the learning process and academic success.

Because a stigmatized group is defined as having low status and lack of prestige, members of these groups often struggle with negative self-conception. In an attempt to address this stigma, members of out-groups frequently attempt to use creative strategies to increase their individual or group status. However, in cases where visible markers of

difference (such as Blackness) inhibit the use of strategies (such as intergroup penetration), and in cases where the number of stigmatized members is so few relative to majority group members, reduced efficacy and motivation can set in, and lead members to acquiesce to the stigma that is cast them (Hogg 2003). The ability to effectively resist this stigma and to effectively navigate a White educational system appears, at least in part, to hinge on the existence of types of Black identity that serve as locations for differing levels of efficacy.

As outlined in Chapter 4, Black students at XYZ Community College are cognizant of the existence of the racial hierarchy within which they are marginalized. These students describe encountering the stereotype of the generic Black student as a major barrier to accessing the processes of learning. In an effort to navigate this barrier, they describe mobilizing resources, that enable particular strategies to assist them in accessing learning processes in the college system.

This chapter outlines Black student respondents' individual accounts of enacting strategies to maneuver within the system of learning, and discusses how Black students simultaneously affect and are affected by the structure of higher education. This reciprocal influence is exhibited differently, depending on the type of racial identity standpoint of the student (*separation, reluctant acceptance, alternate and ambivalence*).

The results of this study indicate four racial identity standpoints that Black students used to respond strategically and routinely to being subordinated. The concept of racial *strategies* refers to lines of personal action based on Black students' repertoires of resources, which are informed by culture and race (Swidler 1986). The first racial identity standpoint is *separation.* The line of action (strategy) associated with this standpoint consistently rejects the label of the generic Black student. This strategy is enacted by all African-born

respondents. These students do not see themselves as aligned with the definition of being Black/African American in the United States.

The second racial identity standpoint, *reluctant acceptance*, accepts and internalizes the stereotype of the generic Black student. The third racial identity standpoint is referred to as *alternate,* which entails a line of action that substitutes stereotypes with a racially conscious definition of Blackness. The fourth racial identity standpoint is *ambivalence.* Similar to African-born respondents, respondents who convey *ambivalence* reject the stereotype of the generic Black student. Strategies associated with the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence* are primarily chosen by U.S.-born Blacks who report perceiving themselves to be of mixed race or having light skin, which enables them to "pass" for White or some ambiguous race, making inappropriate any attempt to align them with the stereotype.

Each racial identity standpoint (*separation, reluctant acceptance, alternate and ambivalence*) includes several distinct strategies. These strategies include a racial *performance* exhibited through a *body project*, and corresponding displays of *agency*. This chapter discusses *body projects* and displays of *agency* unique to each racial identity standpoint. According to the analysis and congruent with body theory, bodily practice is the site of expression of strategies enacted by subordinated Black students as they navigate a White educational system. The discussion, therefore, is anchored in the concept of the physical body as a social construct, being both a subject of oppression and a potential site of agency and self-narration (Butler 1990; Foucault 1991; hooks 1995; Ong 2005; Yancy 2000).

Body projects, ranging from attempts to appear White to stereotype manipulation and demonstrations of superiority, are performed by Black students in their attempt to navigate the White college system. According to Ong (2005), *body projects* have two components:

body product and *body process*. *Body products* are physical manifestations of racial and individual identities. The Black students in this study engage in such bodily performances purposively at times, using the physical body in strategic ways. At other times, the physical *body product*, as a result of body work, is not accomplished consciously—but rather as an outcome of others' (White's) perception of the meanings of their bodies (Ong 2005; Yancy 2000). Much of this body work is invisible to dominants (Whites). It involves the marking and construction of the visible body in an attempt to navigate a normative system of which these actors of color are generally not a part.

Body processes include the non-physical racial marking of the presentation of one's self (Ong 2005). These ways of presenting the self include assimilating to the use of "standard English" language as a matter of regular practice, or temporarily through such strategies as code-switching, managing tone of voice and behavior (which Black students perceive to be more "ordinary", or normative, as well as in their best interest to practice regularly as they navigate the White educational system). Similar to *body products*, *body processes* require significant amounts of time and effort from Blacks students in White institutions. This time and effort is usually invisible to Whites within that same system.

Black student respondents in this study accomplish *body projects* through their reactions to being cast into a devalued racial status, and as they attempt to enact various racial strategies to navigate the White educational environment. Individual *body projects*, therefore, serve as potential sites of agential expression. *Agency* is defined as the ability to play a consciously active part in the development of one's own life. "To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (Bandura 2001:2). Many of the respondents in this study describe possessing qualities of agency as they implement their

plans for educational achievement. Such qualities not only include the ability to plan, but also to self motivate, regulate, and evaluate outcomes of their behavior based, at least in part, on their perceptions of what others believe and how others are likely to act. Understanding others' perceptions and possible actions enable students in racially subordinate positions to enact strategies that help them navigate the White environment more effectively (Bandura 2001). For the Black students in this study, the "others" they need to accurately understand are Whites, because of the overwhelming Whiteness of XYZ Community College.

Each racial identity standpoint (*separation, reluctant acceptance, alternate,* and *ambivalence*) includes routine or generic behavior exhibited through a carefully constructed *body project*. Each standpoint also includes routine, generic sets of perceptions, and discourse and behavior—referred to as *agency*—that serve to position the Black student against the stereotype of the generic Black student. These four racial identity standpoints enable Black students to act, more or less, with agency, and therefore support the hierarchical arrangement to lesser or greater degrees. Not all standpoints, however, enable these students to increase access to the processes of learning.

It is important, then, to inquire into the ways that the Black students in this study act individually or collectively, in routine or in generative ways that affect their positions of subordination. What follows is a discussion of how each *body project* and display of *agency* is associated with potential benefits and costs, both to the White educational institution and to the Black student respondents. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are differences between how African-born Blacks and U.S.-born Blacks enact these strategies.

African-born Blacks: Strategies from a Racial Identity Standpoint of *Separation*

Navigating the barrier of being cast as an outsider, from the standpoint of separation, entails a presentation of the body and corresponding behavior that positions African-born Blacks in opposition to the stereotype of the generic Black student. The strategies used to navigate the barrier of being an outsider include consciously presenting qualities that these African-born Black students perceive to be White. Such qualities include consciously dressing in ways that are perceived to be White and, in some cases, bleaching the skin. Additionally, these qualities include conscious, verbal expressions among the African-born Blacks of affecting a racial identity, as opposed to a U.S.-born Black identity, through stressing European accents and using exclusively "proper" and "standard" English language.

Body Project

African-born Black students attending XYZ Community College enter into a social space that is visibly White. The pervasiveness of this Whiteness creates a model of the normative, ordinary, and potentially successful college student as White. Karen, Christopher, Alex, and Sera—all African-born Blacks—describe enacting strategies that consciously distanced themselves from being mistaken as U.S.-born Black, by instead presenting themselves as White through the use of "proper English". An example of enacting this strategy is given by Sera, who describes presenting herself as congruent with what she perceives to be the White definition of a "potentially successful student".

As an African-born Black student, Sera perceives the need to show Whites that she does not fit the stereotype of the generic Black student, and that she is able to be a successful (that is, White) student. In doing so, not only does she distance herself from being perceived as U.S.-born Black, but she also consciously shifts into a *body process*, via language use, that

she perceives to be congruent with White student performances, pushing aside her African Blackness, or what she may believe to be her authentic self as student, to the edge of her identity.

When asked how she navigates the White college as a Black student, she responds that she consciously presents herself as "proper". By "proper", she means that her verbal presentation of self and ideas are congruent with her perception of White students' presentations:

> **Sera:** [I] definitely speak proper grammar. Proper grammar is a big thing . . . Yes. It's a very conscious shift. It really is. Because we both understand that if it is somebody that does not know me and I'm trying to gain their respect, and we definitely have different cultures, I'm watchful of my grammar. I really am. I try to act very, very nice and proper. And yeah, it's very conscious.

In addition to enacting a *body process* by presenting herself as "proper", and therefore more White, Sera also describes consciously enacting a *body product* that serves to distance herself from U.S.-born Blacks, so that she appears closer to White body standards. She thus describes making an effort to "comport" herself physically in a desire to distance herself from the negative stereotypes she perceives to be related to her dark skin color:

> **Sera:** Also, I'm aware of my posture. How I dress. I mean, how I comport myself because I hate, cause a lot of people stereotype people in a sense (by skin color). And I guess I don't want to fall into whatever the expectations of my skin color already [are]. I guess I want to prove them wrong . . . I want them to know I'm not from here (U.S.-born Black).

Sera articulates the connection between presenting herself through a *body project*, which distances her from U.S.-born Blacks, and appearing more "ordinary" and White. Similar to Sera, Savina and Noah makes a conscious effort through *body processes*, using language to portray themselves as more White than Black. They also enact a *body product* that marks their physical bodies as congruent with what they perceive to be the prevalent image of ordinary White students. They accomplish this product by physically presenting themselves as diametrically opposed to the image of the generic Black through their choice of dress and hairstyle:

> **Savina:** I feel like we (African-born Blacks) have like a bad name because of the way they've (U.S.-born Blacks) been behaving. So, I don't want to be considered like them. I would rather stay away from them. I don't dress like them. The reason they will first mistake you as African-American will be the way you dress. But, when you open your mouth to talk, that will make a difference because you will have another accent and all of that. It helps. And, also for me, with my braid, it makes me stand apart from African-Americans. I have someone actually telling me that, you know, I can see that you're not from here. And I asked why and he's like, you dress differently. And the reason I dress differently– I want to make a difference between me and those people (U.S.-born Blacks). I'm gonna shows them (Whites) that I'm smart, I'm pretty, I'm sexy and I can do whatever a white skin can do.

Noah also illustrates a conscious awareness of managing his physical appearance (*body product*) and language (*body process*). He emphasizes differences between U.S.-born Blacks and himself, thereby distancing himself from the stereotype of the generic Black

student. By default, this "less Black" performance makes him "more White", or at least "European Black", in part, because of his French accent:

> **Noah:** When I first got there, and still now, I mean, my dressing and everything shows that "yeah, he's new here and not from here". I don't wear big pants and my boxers are not showing, you know? They (Whites) don't really, like, know (where I'm from) until I tell or until I speak (he has a French accent). "Oh, you're from Africa!" they say . . . This one girl at school, she's like, "You and your friend dress differently. Not like the stereotyped African American here. I mean you tell you're not Black from here" I'm like, "That's nice to know! Thank you!"

The type of passing (as non-U.S.-born Black and as more White) illustrated by Sera, Savina, and Noah is different from the type of passing attempted by U.S.-born Black students who operate from the standpoint of *ambivalence*. The African-born Black respondents who operate from the standpoint of *separation* enact a body project of "being White" by acknowledging and invoking the racial hierarchy in the United States. This separation enables them to avoid being stereotyped into the place they perceive to be the location normally reserved for U.S.-born Blacks: the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Conversely, U.S.-born Blacks operate from the standpoint of *ambivalence* to attempt to "pass" as White or align with White standards. *Ambivalence* operates by enabling the person to deny and minimize the existence or relevance of racial categories, so he or she might present him or herself as an individual, and downplay the existence and relevance of race.

Skin bleaching is a more extreme example of a bodily practice employed to "pass" as something more ordinary and normative. Through this type of strategy, the *body product* is "part cultural product" (because the goal is to become closer to the cultural ideal of White)

and “part agential process” (because these African-born Blacks consciously choose to participate in this years-long and expensive process of skin bleaching) (Ong 2005:600).

In the following excerpts, Amelia and Savina discuss their experiences with skin bleaching. Amelia discusses bleaching as a performance related to her current *body product*. She has been actively bleaching for several years. In addition to bleaching, she also manages her dark skin by restricting her exposure to the sun:

> **Amelia:** If you darker, yeah, sometimes they (Whites and U.S.-born Blacks) make fun of your darker skin. But people sometimes use skin-lightening lotion. To lighten their skin up to become lighter. I actually bleached my skin. I started about six months before my wedding. So, if you lighter, you have a lot of privileges. They (Whites) think they’re the cutest and they’re lighter . . . way lighter than even I. Yeah. I’m careful not to get dark (even though she currently bleaches her skin) . . . I’m gonna take my umbrella with me. Because I don’t wanna– yeah, I know I’m dark skinned, but, sorry I don’t wanna be any tanner [laughing]. So, I took my umbrella.

Savina discusses her bleaching as a past practice, discontinued not by her choice, but because of health problems. Savina expresses some regret in having been forced to stop her skin lightening routine:

> **Savina:** I’m gonna say something personal . . . You’re the first person, and the first White person I told this to. I never mentioned it to anybody . . . I used to be really, really light skinned. But, that wasn’t my natural skin. I never told this to anybody, but I bleached my skin. I was so miserable being Black. I just wanted to be good, to be White, but now, I getting my Black skin back. That’s why I have all of those [she points to her uneven skin pigment patches]. My Aunt, she give me this chance (to

> bleach); I'm like, "I want something that will take this Black skin away. I don't want the dark skin". She give me a lotion, she said, "that will help you, with time". I put the lotion all over my body. You would think I was mixed because of all those lotion. Even the man I married, he didn't know that I was really dark skinned because you would never see it. When I had my boys, I was so sick, you know, I couldn't, you know, take care of myself and all of that. Of course, you need to keep taking care of yourself (continue applying the lotion). That is when, you know, my natural skin came back. I have days where I wish I didn't stop. I really have.

Both Amelia and Savina perceive that they access benefits through participating in such strategies as bleaching, which enables them to approximate their skin to the cultural ideal of Whiteness. Amelia articulates a perception that "privileges" are more closely associated with White skin than Black skin. Similarly, Savina associates being dark with being "miserable" and "bad", and associating White with being "good". Amelia and Savina consciously choose to bleach their skin for the purpose of elevating themselves from their positions of subordination; therefore, their *body product* is a site of individual agential action.

Body Projects, Agency, and the White Educational Institution

Because the African-born Black respondents have been forced to deal with an automatic, generalized association with the same "generic Black student" stereotype with which U.S.-born Black respondents deal, their physical bodies are subjects of oppression. Through self-narration and conscious choices of dress and appearance, however, they demonstrate capacities to affect the meaning of their African Blackness; therefore, their physical bodies and linguistic expressions are also sites of agency.

Overall, however, respondents participating in strategies to access processes of learning from the racial identity of *separation* pose minimal threat to the dominant system at the college. While their existence as students with dark skin may challenge the system to redefine what a successful student looks like, the predominant *body project* focused on "passing" as a "Black-White" does not challenge the system to change in any significant way. While this type of race performance does not threaten the established White authority, it may reinforce that authority because by "passing" or assimilating by dress, speech, and appearance, these students actually offer evidence that color does not determine success, nor does the current structure pose as a barrier to success. They present themselves as Black and successful; therefore, other Black students can be successful, too—effectively reinforcing the predominant colorblind philosophy that "race does not matter".

Summary

African-born Black students in this study are aware of the U.S. racial hierarchy, which situates Blacks in lower positions than Whites. Because of this awareness, these students enact a *body project* that includes the presentation of a *body product* and a *body process* that marks and distances them from U.S.-born Blacks. The African-born Black respondents perceive the colorblindness and negative stereotyping of Black students at XYZ Community College as barriers with which they must contend in order to access equal education. In their efforts to deal with this Black "misandric" environment (anti-Black stereotyping and marginality), they act to position themselves closer to the ideal of the White students and to distance themselves from the generic Black student (Smith et al. 2007). This action not only enhances their access to the processes of learning, but also serves to support the same type of race-based hierarchy upon which the college is based.

U.S.-born Blacks: Strategies from a Racial Identity Standpoint of *Reluctant Acceptance*

U.S.-born Blacks differ from African-born Blacks in the ways in which they perceive, respond, and position themselves relative to the stereotype of the generic Black student. While African-born Blacks enact strategies which distance themselves from this stereotype by creating a separate an elevated position for themselves in the existing racial hierarchy, U.S.-born Blacks enact racial strategies to differentiate, rather than separate, themselves to a greater or lesser degree from this stereotype. They use *body products* and *processes* from the racial identity standpoints of *reluctant acceptance, alternate and ambivalence* to accomplish this differentiation.

All of the respondents have enacted strategies to help them access processes of learning at XYZ Community College. However, U.S.-born Blacks who take the racial identity standpoint of *reluctant acceptance* of the stereotype of the generic Black student struggled more than Black students who positioned themselves in the other racial identity standpoints. This group of Black students described possessing the fewest resources (see Chapter 4, section entitled "Mobilizing resources from a racial identity standpoint of *reluctant acceptance*") of all groups. Since strategies are lines of personal action based upon repertories of resources, these students were more focused on managing their apparent anger and confusion at a White dominated system and on continuing to exist as a student than on implementing strategies of navigation for better access to learning.

Body Project

The *body projects* of the two respondents who represent this mode of racial adaptation illustrate a struggle over rejecting the stereotypical look and sound of the generic Black, while simultaneously aligning their appearance and presentation-of-self with the

stereotype of the generic Black. Both Darryl and Aliyah talked in contradictory terms regarding opportunities for Black and White students. They presented a *body project* reflecting *reluctant acceptance* of the stereotype of the generic Black, but also, at times, described themselves as Black and powerful, while at the same time mired in the Whiteness of the college. This incongruity indicates a lack of coherent presentation-of-self, related not only to racial identity regarding the Whiteness surrounding them at the college, but also to their options or strategies for navigating this Whiteness as Black students.

Because neither Darryl nor Aliyah were aware of acting in ways that embraced the stereotype, neither one verbalized intentionally displaying types of *body products* or *processes* that align with the stereotype. Rather, both of these respondents demonstrated *reluctant acceptance* through their physical presentation-of-self during the interviews.

Darryl displayed a *body product* consistent with the stereotypical Black urban male. He wore a flat-billed hat, baggy pants (which were sagged to show his underpants), a professional sports jersey, and some "bling". When I first spoke to Darryl about participating in the study, I suspected that he was only marginally interested in being interviewed. His body posture, in particular, suggested a lack of interest. His body posture was open and closed at the same time. His knees were spread apart and arms were open, but he was slumped down in his chair and only infrequently made eye contact. He told me that I was only allowed to interview him once; instead of permitting the three separate interviews specified in the "Description of Procedures" in the *Informed Consent Document* (see Appendix C). Additionally, he verbally set an hour time limit on our one interview, and refused to answer several questions when he perceived I was "getting into his business".

Darryl describes his experience of being Black at a White college in contradictory ways. On the one hand, he states that "everybody's getting the same education, you know, Whites and Blacks", but on the other hand, he claims that because he is Black, he faces additional struggles, including invisibility, at a predominantly White college. The isolation and frustration resulting from this invisibility manifests itself, at least in part, in expressions of dislike for White people:

> **Darryl:** Students around here, I don't want to talk about nobody, but this is "country". They (Whites at the college) don't have no *culture* background, you know? They probably don't even think there's a Black President still! I don't know. It's "country"! School is hard. School is– ain't easy. School is really hard. School is hard! Too many White, not many Blacks! And if I had a problem, I ain't talkin about it to nobody. I just don't put my business out there. That's just the Black side of me. I don't like to put my business out there. For me I *don't like* a lot of White people, they tell you all about *their* life. They don't think about yours. It's like that here. I guess I would more likely talk about my business to Black people.

Darryl states that even though Blacks and Whites have equal educational opportunity, being one of so few Blacks at the college is an isolating experience. He describes a dislike for Whites, and consciously chooses to keep to himself.

In the following example, Darryl describes being Black as being empowering, yet marginalizing at the same time. Darryl also describes himself as liking his Blackness, and equates being a Black male with power. However, he struggles with transferring these feelings of comfort and power into the predominantly White environment of the college:

> **Darryl:** What does it mean to be a Black man? Power! It's good to be Black. I don't know about you, but for me, it's good, I'm happy to be Black. I love it! I'm Black. I like it. Oh yeah. I'm real cocky with my race. I don't deal with them White men right now. I ain't working, so I don't have to deal with them. I got my own little world that I've created. It's awesome. I go to school, do my little part-time gig, go home, and have some friends on the weekend. Man I just don't try to get close to nobody (no White people). When I did have to deal with them (White men), it got too ghetto. Kinda like the White boys they knew everything and you don't. But at school, Whites don't think about Black people. Like if this is a predominantly Black area, then they will *have* to teach for Black people. But there's nobody to fight for Blacks at this school. Who's going to fight for the Black man at this school?

Aliyah also displayed a *body product* consistent with the stereotype of the single Black mother. She complained about how her children's unruliness and her lack of ability to deal with them meant there was no time for her own appearance. She used obscenities, and stated that she usually attended school disheveled. Aliyah's *body process*, via her choice of linguistic expression, represented congruence between the stereotype she perceives Whites have of Black women and how she sees herself. Aliyah described a situation when an instructor reprimanded her for being too loud in class. Even though she perceived herself as naturally loud, she also expressed an understanding that this behavior is consistent with the stereotype of the generic Black, and is therefore undesirable:

> **Aliyah:** There was an issue where some kids in class, oh my gosh I can't believe I didn't talk about this yet. I had to meet with the teacher. I felt like I was being singled out by the teacher because I am adamant about something in class and I thought that

> is what he wanted us to do, is argue our points. I damn near could have got suspended because somebody felt threatened by me because of my opinions, and I voiced them so loud. I was worried, oh my God. I must have scared the whole class. He was just like "we need to talk". I was like, this man (her instructor) called me loud and Black! He said I was intimidating, trying to push my point of view on them and not hear their point of view. Everybody knows me, but I come across as like being intimidating because I get so adamant about it. It comes off that I get loud when I get upset or when I feel like I am being cornered. It is just like a defense mechanism. I get, I mean, I get boisterous. Then my voice gets to crackling and I want to cry because I am embarrassed that I am loud. You know what I am saying? I actually think I did cry in one class. Well, the way I make sense of it is that I really honestly have to flip the switch and think of how they (Whites) feel looking at me, the one Black student in the class. I ask myself "you want to be the Black acting like a donkey in class in front of all these White folks?"

Aliyah describes a continual struggle between accepting her boisterous personality type that reflects the stereotype of the generic Black student and tempering it with restraint. She does not describe any particular strategy for dealing with this conflict. Near the end of her response, she mentions, "flipping the switch (to get herself to) think about how the Whites" may be interpreting her "loud behavior". This is a practice of taking-the-role-of-another, which is the first step toward adopting an outsider-within perspective. She stops short, however, of being able to use this resource. Unlike a true outsider-within perspective, her act of envisioning how Whites see her leads not to alternate strategies of navigating the white environment, but rather to her adoption of what she perceives as White behavior:

concluding that if she acts in ways that reflect her true personality, she may match the negative stereotype of the loud Black woman. She describes choosing to quiet herself because that is what she perceives Whites want her to do. In order for her to segue this ability to take-the-role-of-another into an outsider-within perspective and use it as a resource, she would possibly make this same choice, but she would describe it as a choice that allows her to navigate the White environment easier, not as an act that only increases her frustration level and makes her feel trapped and without recourse.

Body Projects, Agency, and the White Educational Institution

Aliyah and Darryl display low levels of efficacy and agency. Both students describe arriving at this college with little experience of being able to control neither the events of their daily lives nor the trajectory of their educational paths. At times, they describe themselves as having some personal control over the outcome of their learning experiences, but more often, the actions of others, over whom they have no control, need to be present. For example, Aliyah describes several situations in which White instructors took an interest in her or "believed in her", but she describes these situations as happening on their own accord, not as a consequence of any attempt by her to "agentically" enlist the assistance of others. Her overall perception is that White instructors have a preconceived bias against her, because she is Black:

> **Aliyah:** It is probably all just in my head but I feel like because we are Black, they (Whites) are not going to want to expect us to succeed. I am thinking that they are thinking, well, we have this little Black lazy girl in here and she is only going to give me what she is going to. She will probably get a C or D. She is not going to try. So

> then, I am in there like trying to bust my ass to try to prove a point to only myself because everyone there does not see the point.

Aliyah has some family members who serve as strong role models of Blacks who have "made it" (succeeded in their college education), but she does not see herself as possessing the skills necessary to manage such pressures. She talks about how difficult learning is for her, and speculates she may have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She reports having dropped out of XYZ Community College and subsequently re-enrolled multiple times, having to retake numerous classes. Similarly, Darryl has family members who have been successful in academia, however, he describes perceiving that the "White system" around the Midwest is insurmountable, relegating him to inferior and isolated status.

Because students who express a racial identity standpoint of *reluctant acceptance* appear to internalize the stereotype of the generic Black student, they do not see themselves as part of a group that could potentially mobilize resources to enact change in the college. They describe their presence *as opposed to* the predominant Whiteness of the campus, and therefore apart from what they perceive as the cohesive group on campus—not *as part of* any particular collective or whole.

Students engaged in *reluctant acceptance* as a race performance pose minimum threat to the dominant system. In reality, these students may inadvertently feed into the stereotype of the generic Black student. For the White structure, they serve as examples of the problems of Black students. This condition reifies stereotypes of individual Black students, diverts attention from structural barriers that inhibit their success, and casts Black students as being

in need of fixing. Students enacting this type of race performance are unlikely to pressure the White structure to change in any way.

Summary

Students who operate from the racial identity standpoint of *reluctant acceptance* do not see themselves as being connected to, or having the ability to connect to, the larger White structure. Additionally, they do not see themselves as being connected to a source of ethnic strength or identity on campus. Due to *reluctantly accepting* the negative stereotype of being Black, these students engage in racial strategies that alienate them from opportunities for learning more than students who enact the racial strategies informed by the racial identity standpoints of *separation, ambivalence*, or *alternative*.

Students situated in the standpoint of *reluctant acceptance* continually struggle with inconsistencies regarding how they describe themselves as Blacks and how they feel defined by White society. Their *body projects*, rather than being accomplished purposefully to enact strategies to navigate a system of which they are not a part, are more reflections of others' (Whites') perception and definition of their bodies (Ong 2005). Among the four groups, they describe the highest levels of frustration regarding access to learning. Additionally, they pose the lowest threat to the White institution, and describe themselves as encountering race-based barriers with the fewest options of how to navigate them.

U.S.-born Blacks: Strategies from an *Alternate* Racial Identity Standpoint

Black students who operate from an *alternate* racial identity standpoint actively resist racial performances motivated by, or which indicate, a desire to assimilate or "pass" for White. Contrary to African-born Black students who practice *separation,* and U.S.-born

Black students who position themselves as *ambivalent* to racial categories, *alternate* Black students act in ways that reflect an alternative, strong, conscious Black identity. Corresponding lines of action frequently result in a lifting—at least temporarily—of stereotypes associated with being Black, and sometimes create either an appearance of superiority to Whites or a presentation of a "new ideal" (Ong 2005) of what it means to be Black.

Body Projects

The *body projects* enacted by Black students situated in an *alternate* racial identity standpoint include such *body products* as embracing their kinky hair and purchasing clothes that fit their curvy shapes. The *body processes* of these students included linguistic modifications, but only in the form of temporary and consciously constructed deviations of what they perceive their cultural language to be. This linguistic strategy is illustrated through "code-switching". Additionally, these students described using restraint, often through non-action, in a strategic way to avoid marking themselves as too extreme or apart from the White norm, while at the same time enabling them to avoid being "White". Through code-switching and restraint, Black students who are situated in an *alternate* racial identity constructed a *body process* that allowed them to navigate the normative White environment while maintaining their Black identity.

Body product.

Black students in the *alternate* category, through *body projects*, enacted both *body products* and *processes* within a unique understanding of privilege and oppression. These students described themselves in ways that clearly indicated they occupied an outsider-within status. These Black students were most clearly aware, out of all three groups of U.S.-born

Black students, of their objectified status (according to normative White definitions of their identity). They were also critically aware of White patterns of thinking, being, and doing (Hill Collins 1986). Because they were *critically* aware of being outsiders-within, they were more likely to perceive the beliefs and possible actions of others (Whites) accurately. Therefore, they strategically constructed *body projects* that marked them as Black in ways that helped them maintain their Blackness while they navigated White culture.

Nikki, for example, discusses her choice to let her hair be naturally kinky. By leaving her hair in its natural state, she attempts to construct a *body product* consistent with being proud both of her Black heritage and the physical attributes that frequently accompany this heritage. When Whites comment on the beauty of her hair, she describes feeling conflicted. She is confident that her natural hair is an expression of her Blackness, but at the same time, because it is a bit more relaxed than "pure black" hair, it in some way illustrates an unintended compromise between her intent to portray an alternate beauty standard to the White beauty standard of straighter hair:

> **Nikki:** In class we watched this film about little girls, black and white, and what color of doll they like. When we had the class discussion, I was the only Black female, so everybody looked at me. Then they mentioned something about a straightening comb, and somebody goes, "What's a straightening comb?" And then I'm like, *don't* look at me. Black women's hair, it's the worst topic. Oh god, I don't know. It's just one of those stereotypes that has been around forever, I guess. I have naturally in-between kinky hair. I like my hair, but I hate it when people (Whites) say they love it. Why, because it's nice and in-between? It's like the skin color thing. Light-skinned people**,**

it's a ranking. That's what it is. The coarser the hair, the lower the rank. The finer or the straighter the hair, the higher the rank. So it's a way to rank.

Nikki's body project, exhibited by her natural hair, is simultaneously a source of pride and stress. Nikki sometimes finds herself being cast as spokesperson for her group. Because she is frequently the only Black in a class, when issues of race surface in class discussion, she is perceived to be the spokesperson for her racial group. When this occurs, she describes feeling uncomfortable. Even though she has a strong sense of Black identity, this experience is a form of othering, and as such, distances her from the discussion of the rest of her classmates. By casting her as the model for her racial group, her authority to participate in the discussion as an equal is diminished.

Similar to Nikki, Trina discusses a certain physical attribute associated with being Black. She discusses how the curviness of her body makes it difficult for her to present herself in a way that displays the image she desires. The lack of stores in the area that carry clothes to accommodate what Trina describes as, "Black tastes and shapes", puts pressure on her to compromise her choice to display a *body product* that represents her Blackness:

Trina: Whites, they don't have any fashion here. [Laughing] They don't have ANY. A lot of the Black fashion, it's made differently from some of the, the white stores that I see, that are made more shapely, then like for what some of the white people might be shaped like. First off, Hollister, like you have to be very skinny and basically have no curves to shop there. And, um, some of the brands that I wear, like Rocawear, Baby Phat, is more for people that have more of a curvy shape. I have to shop eBay or on-line to like Macy's or something like that. I don't think it's fair. It's hard, because I feel like why should I have to go to a different city to go shop if I

> already live in this city? . . . Unless I wanna go to, like, Younker's Plus Size or something, but that's more like the older women [laughing] so, I have to go far away or adapt to what's here, and that sucks.

While hair and clothing may be two separate parts of appearance, both Trina and Nikki point to frustration with the prevalence of White norms of appearance, and how this prevalence leaves fewer choices and options for Blacks who opt for alternative bodily expressions of their identity.

Body process: Code-switching.

Students operating from the *alternate* standpoint of racial identity use the linguistic strategy of code-switching, and also the strategy of restraint (defined below), to portray themselves as legitimate and ordinary when they perceive it to be advantageous to them. As opposed to students who operate from the standpoints of *separation* or *ambivalence*, who appropriate the use of Standard English as part of their *body process* to "pass", these students are consciously aware of using Standard English only as a means to an end. Additionally, the *body process* of restraint, used by Black students who adopt an *alternate* racial identity standpoint, is not enacted as a strategy to fit in to the White culture for the purpose of assimilation, but rather as a conscious practice to help them maneuver the White educational system while maintaining a solid sense of Blackness.

In this study, Black students who situate themselves in an *alternate* racial identity described being Black within a White system as being "doubly constituted" (Arnett Ferguson, 2001:209). Through the vantage point of the outsider-within status, they described being aware of the benefits of being able to switch into "White" language, behavior, styles of dress, or appearance. As opposed to the Black students in this study who sought to pass as

White (*ambivalent* racial identity standpoint), these students remained fully conscious of their Blackness as they code-switched into White vernacular—a strategy that may ultimately help them access the system of learning. In this sense, the practice of code-switching served as a strategy for Blacks to navigate a predominantly White system through a *body process* that focused specifically on language use.

Tyler, for example, describes feeling fully Black when he uses Standard English to navigate the White system. Tyler echoes responses from Robert, William, and Trina in his explanation that code-switching is a deliberate act, a consciously-constructed *body process*, that balances the inaccurate image of Blacks as being "refracted through" (Arnett Ferguson 2001:209) White stereotypes with the true (and positive) meaning of Blackness they have internalized as part of their racial identity.

> **Tyler:** When I'm working with them (other Blacks), helping them navigate the system, when I'm using the proper [pause] I don't know, Victorian English, and I have a Black family with me, and I'm using that form of language to navigate the system, it makes me feel more Black, because I'm able to use the dominant group's language against them to help get the right thing done for these, you know, this Black family, or these Black kids that normally wouldn't be able to get it done on their own, because they're not able to do that yet.

Similar to Tyler, Nikki describes using caution and forethought in her discursive patterns at XYZ Community College. She describes being aware of ways of speaking acceptably around Black students and a somewhat different way of speaking that is required around Whites:

> **Nikki:** Oh, yeah. You've got to step out way more. And you're conscious of it. I'm conscious of it. Well you know, it's like tip-toe, it's like I say, you don't want to come off too strong or say the wrong thing that will offend. Or like if you say, "White people"—Blacks can say that around Black people; Blacks can't say that around White people. So, yeah, I modify what I choose to say.

Similarly, Raven discusses how code-switching is part of the practice of "playing the game". Raven perceives that because of the disjuncture between the White and Black culture, and because of the privilege associated with the White culture, she needs to spend more energy than the ordinary White student in deciding how to present herself in ways White teachers will understand:

> **Raven:** When I'm at a predominantly white college, and I'm dealing with more teachers that are white, I learn to open my mouth, and I ask for help, even if it's not during class, you know, I'll come to them afterward, or I'll e-mail. I'm more forceful, you know, when something needs to be done, or I don't agree with something, 'cause I realize because of where I am, I have to do that, whereas, you know, when I'm at a Black school, the teachers understand (Blacks) . . . I've had to approach White people in a different way (due to being Black). So I've had to judge how I say things to you (White teachers) because you know you don't understand Ebonics and slang. And then I've had to adjust how you perceive what I'm saying to you: I have to play the game.

According to Ong (2005), students of color attempting to navigate a predominantly White environment sometimes employ the strategy of demonstrating superiority. Demonstrations of superiority are similar to practices of code-switching, because both

strategies use the dominant language, or way of doing things, as a means to an end. Tyler, for example, describes his ability to code-switch as being multilingual, which he perceives is indicative of superior linguistic abilities, while at the same time promoting an alternate image of Blackness.

> **Tyler:** I know, that me personally, that I think that the slang language and the Black vernacular is more artistic than just your regular English language. So to me, I feel that some Black people are a lot smarter and a lot more gifted than White people because they have, they know two languages basically. And it's hard to know two languages and to be able to use both of those languages on and off– is to me a talent in itself.

In essence, students who use code-switching as a strategy enacted through *bodily process* are aware of the need to inhabit two cultures: the native Black culture to which they identify and the White culture, where expected language use is a matter of necessity to navigate the educational system successfully. These students describe the value of being able to code-switch as being able to present themselves in ways they perceive others, who have racial privilege, deem as worthy and understandable, but without compromising their Black identity.

However, simultaneously inhabiting two identities in order to navigate a dominant system that one is not fully part of can also be stressful and damaging (Ferguson 2001). Use of the dominant language can be subversive, but it can also inadvertently strengthen normative communication patterns. Additionally, code-switching can take a psychological toll by alienating a person from his or her cultural and racial identity. Despite possible

negative effects, the ability to code-switch is described by this study's respondents as a valued strategy, because it assists them with navigating a White educational system.

Body process: Restraint.

Some respondents who operate from the standpoint of an *alternate* racial identity describe the ability to restrain themselves in White surroundings as a strategy. On the one hand, restraining the expression of one's racial identity is potentially damaging, in the sense that it disallows true acceptance of one's self. On the other hand, checking one's true identity at the door, so to speak, for the purpose of navigating a dominant system has potentially positive consequences. Similar to the study's Black students who report the highest degrees of efficacy and the strongest inclination to code-switch, the respondents who describe using restraint as a strategy to navigate the white educational system were among the students who describe possessing an in-depth, and clear, outsider-within status.

Jamal, for example, believes in practicing a type of conscious restraint that helps him navigate the educational system. Instead of overtly contesting stereotypes and race-based assumptions when they occur, he often decides to remain unnoticed in those situations. Thus, he avoids drawing the type of attention to his outsider perspective that would result in his being marginalized. Furthermore, he describes going through a process of maturation, where he shifted from feeling like a "victim" to feeling like a "victor". He therefore interprets such strategies as conscious acts of restraint, choices he enacts in order to deal with being marginalized in classrooms, rather than being forced to restrain himself without choice.

> **Jamal:** I have to actually kind of hold myself, kind of control myself a little bit better as far as when they get into different topics in class (with all Whites) that may affect race or affect ways of thinking. Um, and try to keep my mouth shut and just go along

> with what's going on. Because anything that I express that isn't being in line with the mainstream is not going to be, it's not going to be looked on objectively. You know, it's going to be criticized, so in that aspect I just have to keep my mouth shut and go with the flow, you know pretty much . . . I think as I've come through the decades [laughter], I think as a young Black man, I thought it (understanding others' views) wasn't important, it was only important from my perspective as being felt like being, um, a victim. Deliberately . . . I think as I matured, I understand I'm not a victim; I'm a victor. I can survive as a Black.

Jamal describes a conscious practice of evaluating the potential effects of sharing his true perspective with Whites at the college. He also articulates how an ability to understand dominant cultural views allows him to practice restraint without feeling victimized. Likewise, Robert perceives he is more apt to survive in the classroom if he restrains himself when race-related topics come up in class.

> **Robert:** The only thing that kinda bugs me is if they're talking about slavery in the discussion. I don't feel comfortable about that because it's just like [pause] I don't know, it's just kind of weird because everyone just kinda looks over at me, and it just puts me out, it puts me on the spot, I guess, and then look for me to elaborate on certain things, and I choose not to. Why would I want to draw attention to myself then? That's why rather than me getting angry or saying how I truly feel about a situation, it's best for me that I just not say anything at all.

The Black student respondents in this study who describe themselves as inhabiting a strong, "conscious", *alternate* Black identity standpoint also perceive themselves as having the greatest ability to enact strategies to maintain their Blackness while navigating the White

educational system. Through the *body processes* of code-switching and restraint, these Black students feel they were able to persist as they contested and negotiated their place within a White educational system. These conscious Black students perceive that they were able to enact an alternative strategy to get around the "problem of difference" (Hill Collins 1986:16). Contrary to the other groups of U.S.-born Black students (*ambivalence* and *reluctant acceptance*), assimilating or acquiescing to the stereotype are not parts of their strategy to deal with being thrust into this stereotype. Through their *body project*, they purposely present themselves as being different from Whites and from the generic Black student stereotype: an action that suggests that the negative *meaning* attached to difference is the problem—not the difference itself (Hill Collins 1986; hooks 1994).

Body Projects, Agency, and the White Educational Institution

Black students operating from an *alternate,* or conscious, racial identity standpoint enacted *body projects* that presented physical attributes traditionally associated with Black heritage, such as hair type and body shape, as authentic. Additionally, they utilized the linguistic styles of code-switching, restraint, and demonstrations of multilingual superiority to maintain their sense of Blackness while "playing the game" in order to navigate XYZ Community College.

Also, Black students operating from the standpoint of the *alternate* racial identity described acting more "agentically" than students in the other modes (*separation, reluctant acceptance,* or *ambivalence*). Their sense of personal racial identity, belonging, and power to contest the stereotype of the generic Black student enabled them to define and promote an alternative definition of Blackness within the predominantly White college.

None of the students operating from an *alternate* racial identity claimed an overwhelming feeling of isolation or aloneness. They sometimes described facing the barrier of isolation, because they were the "only Black" in a class within the college or locale. However, they described this experience as being something they could navigate or endure. Most commonly, these students referred to other groups on or off campus to which they belonged either formally or informally. Even if they were the only Black student in a given class, they talked about a larger sense of belonging outside of class. For example, students in the *alternate* group described themselves as being connected to a larger group of conscious Blacks, seldom found on XYZ campus, but which frequently transcended the walls of the college.

Raven and Nikki reported having experiences being Black students at Predominantly Black Colleges (PBC). They describe their previous experience at PBCs as serving as a reference point to a larger group of Black college students. Such experiences provide a symbolic reference group for Nikki and Raven, and have the effect of supporting strategic racial performances of presenting their physical bodies and using linguistic styles as authentic.

Even though few Black students currently attend the predominantly White XYZ Community College, those who operated from an *alternate* racial identity standpoint described belonging to a larger group of conscious Black college students outside the college's walls. This group belongingness appeared to have given them the stability and confidence upon which to question aspects of the dominant system that posed barriers to their learning.

In addition to a strong sense of personal racial identity and group belongingness, the ability to contest White definitions of Blackness and promote an alternate definition of Blackness set this group of Black students apart from the other groups of Black respondents in this study. This group of *alternate* Black students demonstrated, differently from the other groups of Black students (*separation*, *reluctant acceptance*, and *ambivalence*), the power to contest the stereotype of the generic Black student.

Contestation of this stereotype calls into question the legitimacy of the racial hierarchy upon which the stereotype is based. Because of the colorblindness of XYZ Community College, and the associated White privilege of this hierarchy, this group poses the greatest threat to the structure of the college. The contestations they enact sometimes take the form of parody.

The act of parody is sometimes used to expose hierarchical structures and practices as illegitimate (Butler 1990). Through such subversion, subordinated actors are able to show dominants (Whites) that racial hierarchies are socially constructed, and therefore are able to be alternately defined. For example, Raven describes consciously playing the part of the "class clown" to give herself a platform on which to parody stereotypes of Blacks for the purpose of "breaking the ice": to make the atmosphere in the classroom more relaxed and conducive to her learning:

> **Raven:** Some teachers, when it comes to them being in class with Black people and a question comes up that seem kinda, "Oh god, this is uncomfortable. Am I making this student feel odd?" Most of the time I'm the only Black student in class here on this campus, and I'll say something, probably something naughty, and I'll do it on purpose to get a reaction out of my class, and everybody just kinda [gasp!]. It makes

> the class more comfortable for me. I'm messing with the teacher; I'm messing with everybody else. [For example], We're talking about [pause] foods in the class and somebody said something about chicken, and they were saying, oh well, this is a really good place to find really good chicken, and one of the other students said, "Oh, Raven hasn't tried them?" And I said, "No, not all black people like chicken like that". And it's like it got really quiet. Why? "I just don't like the grease. The thighs can't take it". You know, I laughed afterward, but they had to catch it for a minute, "Oh my god, do we come off as racist by asking her because the whole thing is Black people love chicken". But that's not what it was. I mean, sometimes I will do stuff. [Laughter] I mess with you guys (Whites) [laughter] on purpose.

Through this act of "clowning", Raven acts agentically. She is able to intentionally make things happen by her actions (Bandura 2001); in this case, causing Whites to question race-based stereotypes, and therefore giving her space to assert the inaccuracies of such stereotypes. Likewise, Joseph's practice of frequently dressing in different ways for the purpose of "confusing Whites" calls into question the legitimacy of race-based hierarchies and attendant stereotypes:

> **Joseph**: I use good grammar and dress in ways to confuse or "show" Whites that not all Blacks speak poorly and dress a certain way. I dress in many different styles. And that trips up some people . . . [Sometimes], I'll wear sneakers, you know jeans, whatever, and I like to do acts with my hats, but if I just wore it to– you know, I'd probably get the typical like, "Oh another gangster," whatever. But the very next day or the same day, I'd come in wearing slacks and sweater I might get, you know– it

will still be mixed responses, like kinda shock. It disrupts their stereotype, I think. So they can't label me. They don't know who I am.

In a slightly different form, Tyler also describes intentionally performing in the classroom in academically superior ways for the purpose of dismantling stereotypes of Black students:

Tyler: Whites are surprised with my level of intellectual superiority in the classroom. It's good for them (Whites) to kind of question why they think this way.

Through "clowning", performing "acts with his hats and clothes", and demonstrating intellectual superiority, Raven, Joseph, and Tyler act agentically to lift or contest the stereotype of the generic Black student.

Summary

The stereotype of the generic Black student was described as a barrier to accessing the processes of learning at XYZ Community College by all twenty-one respondents of this study. Of the four different groups of respondents (*separation*, *reluctant acceptance*, *alternate*, and *ambivalent*), the students who operated from the standpoint of an *alternate* racial identity described most success at navigating the Whiteness of the college while challenging the racial stereotype upon which it operates.

Costs to students aligned with an *alternate* racial identity standpoint were relatively low, and were dependent upon several factors. One factor was the amount of invisible work they do in order to "play the game" to navigate the educational structure. Another factor was the strength of their perception of belonging to a larger group of Blacks, either at the college, with their family, or through symbolic membership in a group of Black college students that transcends the walls of XYZ Community College.

U.S.-Born Blacks: Strategies from A Racial Identity Standpoint of *Ambivalence*

U.S.-born Black students operating from the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence*, similar to African-born Blacks, reported struggling to try to present themselves as normative or ordinary, despite the visible barrier of skin color. However, different from the African-born Blacks who also attempted to "pass" by invoking the racial hierarchy in the United States this group of U.S.-born Black students did not distance themselves from the generic Black by calling attention to the stereotype. They instead attempted to ignore or downplay the existence of racial categories and attendant stereotypes.

Body Project

U.S.-born Black students operating from a racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence* describe the process in which they cope with being cast as a racially devalued outsider by relegating their race to the margin of their identities—for the direct purpose of "passing" as White, or at least as multi-racial/mixed-race. This phenomenon is similar to Goffman's (1973) premise that, as social actors, we attempt to construct and portray what we perceive the idealized notion of our performance to be. In this case, the Black student respondents attempt to portray themselves via *body project* in an image of the seemingly raceless, normative student. From the standpoint of the students operating from a racial identity of *ambivalence*, inhabiting a non-normative and "less than" status of Black student is the problem for which gaining entry into the dominant or normative (White) group appears to be the solution (Park 1950; Merton 1972).

Tora highlights this phenomenon in her description of a life-long struggle with her physical appearance and her ability to fit into what she perceives as the normative and desirable group. When she was a child, the normative group was Native American—from

which her Black hair differentiated her. She describes an awareness that grew as she matured from being an older adolescent to an adult—an awareness of White as the normative group, her struggle to navigate this environment because of her self-identification as Native American, and the possibility that others might identify her as Black. In order to navigate the Whiteness of XYZ Community College, she produces a *body product* that marks her as "less visibly Black" by eliminating the kinks in her hair:

> **Tora:** Ah, growing up on the rez (Native American Reservation), everybody's hair was straight, mine was curly, and I was darker, so it gave them different things to tease me about. I didn't know my Black side of my family, I just knew the Native side and I just wanted so much to fit in that I even danced jingo just to try to fit in, but it was the hair. The hair! If my hair wasn't so danged curly . . . it was just so like an Afro, and my mom (who is Native American) didn't help, because she didn't know how to fix it, so she kept it short and that was just it, but it was still curly . . . When I was a teenager I stayed the summer with my Black uncle. It was the first time I ever got a straightener for my hair. Really, I didn't know what they were doing with my hair. But that was the year that "Boomerang" came out, and I wanted to look like Halle Berry [laugh], and I did for a minute. They did my hair, and it was like, "Oh my God", and I loved it!

Tora perceives her hair to be the most visible marker of her Blackness, and has many stories about her attempts to disguise her hair. Like other Black students operating from the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence,* she interprets her best option for navigating the White college as appearing as close to White as she can, or at least as an androgynous representation of several races. Navigating her multi-racial identity, however, is challenging

at times, because it requires correctly interpreting others' interpretations and evaluations of her race. Tora specifically discusses how this process of understanding others' perceptions of her, and being subjected to a White framework regarding the meaning of racial categories, requires extra time and effort not required by normative White students:

> **Tora:** Yesterday, I was in business class. We were talking about casinos. And one of the students made the remark—it has nothing to do with being Black—made a remark about the only people that go to the casinos any more are "them Indians". I was like, "What!?!" And you know, everybody was like "where is he coming from?" He just kept bringing it up [nasal sarcastic tone] "Oh yeah, they're the only ones with any money. They're the only ones who can do anything". And it's like, if you did your research, the Indians in this area are broke. Maybe he thinks I'm *Black*, and it's okay to say this, but no, that can't be; I never wear my hair down. Oh, no. No. It (her hair) usually just goes like this [tight in a ponytail] all the time. So you can't see the kinks, I hate them; I don't wanna show them (kinks).

Similarly to Tora, Andre describes a complex process of navigating the different racial categories to which he perceives he may be classified (Black and White). He defines the qualities of being "outspoken" or "thuggish" as being representative of the negative stereotype of the generic Black student. By describing these verbal qualities as negative, he differentiates himself from these *body processes* he perceives as Black and negative. Additionally, he is conscious of physical characteristics that may mark him as Black. He discusses this awareness, as well as his practice of "hiding" his hair—which helps to mark him as non-black:

> **Andre:** Well, now it's (being equally Black and White) not weird, but when I was younger it was, and [yet] it wasn't. At some points I didn't know how to be myself, you know. Because I didn't really know *what* I was, you know (Black or White) . . . I was at a crossroad or something where I *should* know or *decide* what side I should take or whatever. But really I was just, I don't know, confused. It was because of my race, basically like how I looked. You know, Black basically, but I can look White, too. If I hide my hair, I look kind of White or not Black . . . I don't like to be *outspoken*, I guess. I just, I just like to be chill and be myself. I don't like to dress *flashy* I just, you know, I'm just not like that. Thuggish [pause], it sounds loud [chuckle]. I mean, it looks like [pause] pants below your waist, I mean, sagging, you see your drawers, I mean. Your clothes are too big for you, that's a thug look, you know. Just walking with kind of a, a pep in your step or something like that, I mean, it's *obvious*. It's weird, like I said, I'm kind of torn between the two (Black and White).

Both Tora and Andre describe an ongoing process of attempting to interpret others' perceptions of their race. This is a time-consuming and difficult process for them. Often, because of the complexities surrounding a multi-racial *ambivalen*t identity, students adopt a perception that their individual efforts to "fit in" (that is, become invisible or more White) will get them through college better than any other strategy. Andre articulates how this strategy for academic survival and success is focused at the individual level:

> **Andre:** I know racial hierarchies exist, but I don't want a battle. I just want an opportunity to get an education, and I have one at a personal or individual level.

Jazmin also discusses her perception that college success is mostly a result of individual effort. Despite achieving the status of an honor student, which she describes as a result of her own merit, Jazmin is aware that she is perceived as "other than" White by other students. Rather than describe race as the marker that separates her from ordinary (White) students, she mentions weight. She is very overweight, and describes weight as the largest distinction between herself and other students. It remains unclear, however, from her interview, whether *her* perception of her weight or *others'* (Whites) perception of her weight marks her as being different than the norm, rather than her skin color. However, it is clear that her major strategy to navigate the White system of learning as a Black student is to emphasize her individual academic achievements and downplay the role of race in education:

> **Jazmin:** I know the slavery issue is still going on. I know a lot of people hold grudges from that, but I'm thinkin' like, uh, I'm not suffering from slavery right now. I'm not, so I don't hold grudges that way, because there's no purpose to it. It's like, I'm not pickin' cotton, you know? You get what you put into it (education). I think there is more, um, of an issue of appearance rather than race. Like, I hear more people talking about, um, maybe how you look as opposed to, um, what you look like—I mean, fat or skinny, like that.

Like Tora, Andre, and Jazmin, Joshua also describes how the most effective strategy for navigating a White college is to focus on individual, merit-based academic achievement, and to present similar speech patterns and bodily appearance (for example, straight or hidden hair) to that of the normative and ordinary White students.

For the past year, Joshua has lived on the campus of XYZ Community College, but before that, since the age of 7, he lived in a Black foster home in a Black urban

neighborhood. He was born on a Native American Indian reservation to a Native American mother and a Black father. In describing his racial identity, he said he presented himself as mixed race, but mostly Black, during his years of grade and high school, primarily because of the Black foster home in which he was raised, and because he attended predominantly Black schools. However, since becoming a student at the predominantly White XYZ Community College, he indicated that he perceives it most advantageous to present himself as mixed race without emphasizing his Black heritage, because he believes this image to be most helpful in fitting into the White college environment. In particular, he mentions his light skin and straight hair as physical attributes that signal to others that he is something other than "Black or all Black".

> **Joshua:** My friends, growing up, it would be like, what's your [race], what are you? Because I'm like light skin, and I have my hair, great hair, it's black but straight. Some of them believed me that I was Black, some didn't. When I first came up here, (to XYZ Community College), I didn't see too many African Americans. I saw like a lot more Caucasians. Like this is the first time I've ever been in a higher population of Whites going to school.I kinda felt like I was in a different type [pause] of area like, I don't know, sort of different. But that was when I first come up here. When I'm in class and I'm the only Black, I feel, you know, kinda separated a little bit. But I'm getting used to it. You know, as a Black man. I was thinking, the main thing that we (Blacks) need to do is that we got to try harder and put our mind to it. You know, if we do that, we would be able to do anything in any area that we want.

Joshua, similar to Tora, Andre, and Jazmin, states that he has a clear awareness that his race marks him as different in classrooms where he is the only, or one of the few, Black

students. Also similar to the three other respondents who navigate the college from an *ambivalent* standpoint, he perceives that by "getting used to the White environment" and by trying harder at an individual level, he will be most likely to succeed.

Body Projects, Agency, and the White Educational Institution

The agency expressed by the Black students, who describe their racial identity standpoint as *ambivalent* relative to the stereotype of the generic Black student, is focused at the personal level. These students, when discussing enacting strategies for academic achievement, describe an ability to control themselves and their immediate environment, but not the larger structures around them. When they discuss the larger, predominantly White college environment during their interviews, they describe it as a generally unsafe system, because of the existence of racial hierarchies, but always as somewhat separate from them.

Because they perceive their individual educational successes, "good enough", they seek to avoid race-based conflict at all levels. Andre, for example, discusses his perception that viewing education through a prism of race would not help him navigate through college. Thus, he opts for colorblindness:

> **Andre:** But it is more money that matters nowadays, you know, the way you're raised, not really race anymore. Like I *hate* when people bring up the race card nowadays, because I really don't believe it's a factor or anything. I figure we have just as much opportunity as anybody else, if not more. We (Blacks) have probably more opportunity with affirmative action and all that stuff in regards to getting minorities jobs and educations, and it's kind of starting to get a little, you know, out of hand [chuckle] in regards to that because we're getting so much help. Even if somebody calls you, say somebody calls you the "N" word now, it, it doesn't *matter*

> anymore. I don't know, I don't see why people get so offended about that. I don't know, it's a lot different nowadays, I guess. Everyone has the same opportunities, I guess I should say.

Andre's claim that "race is not really what matters nowadays" is indicative of his attempts to downplay racial categories, and instead accentuate his "racelessness", which he believes closes the gap between himself and Whites.

Because students who operate from the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence* discount the role race plays in education, they pose minimal threat to the dominant educational system. While they may theoretically see the rationale for banning together as a group of students of color to change what they admit is a hierarchical system, they see it as an illogical path for them to take. Similar to African-born students who *separate* themselves as a form of "passing"; students engaged in *ambivalence* give the institution examples of how "race no longer matters in education". Through their *body projects*, these students fail to challenge the colorblindness and resulting alienation of students of color at any level within the college.

Since these students attempt to "pass" by discounting the existence of race, they position themselves as being separate from the larger groups of Blacks on campus. Because they do not see themselves as necessarily belonging to any particular race-based group, but rather to groups of mixed-race students, and because of heavy predominance of Whites on campus, students in this *ambivalent* category appear more isolated than students who are situated in the racial identities of *separation* or *alternate*. Because of this isolation, these students often opt not to get involved with aspects of student life. Their focus on academic success remains on their individual classroom achievement.

Summary

The barrier of being an outsider is a serious impediment to full and equitable access to the processes of learning. Whiteness and its associated privileges are invisible to the White members of XYZ Community College. However, Whiteness and its privileges are sharply visible to students of color. Therefore, skin color becomes a salient and uncomfortable marker of difference. In an attempt to address this discrepancy, the Black students in this study who operate from the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence* expend tremendous amounts of energy minimizing their Blackness, and consciously exhibit White qualities via the construction of *body products* and *processes*—all of which present them as "less-Black", and therefore more congruent with Whites. This body work allows these Black students to focus on their individual academic achievements as evidence that they can "make it". They perceive their achievements as evidence that they are in control of their life trajectories, via hard work and determination, and not some larger category, such as race—something over which they would have no control.

While such strategies as downplaying the existence of racial hierarchies and attempting to present oneself as White or as ambiguously mixed race do appear to assist these students in persisting and navigating the predominantly White learning spaces at XYZ Community College, they do not appear to pressure the dominant system to reduce colorblind or racially biased processes in any way. The costs to such students are moderate, in part, because of the time and effort they expend navigating various identities, and because of the resulting lack of connection to any particular peer group.

Chapter Summary

Predominantly White systems that are raced, like XYZ Community College, require certain patterns of behavior, perception, discourse, and body products by dominants *and* subordinates in order for a race-based hierarchy to continue. Racial identity work, similar to identity work in general, requires strategies that differentiate groups to which one might belong.

Within unequal systems, identity work often includes processes of othering. For example, in this study, dominants (Whites) construct the "other" (Blacks) as a generic and "less-than" stereotypical "other". The respondents of this study report experiencing this type of oppressive othering (Schwalbe 2001). The results of this study indicate Black students respond in one of four distinct ways to being othered as generic Black students, and to being cast as different from the normative White students (*separation*, *ambivalence*, *alternate,* and *reluctant acceptance*). This experience has different effects upon these Black students, based on the resources with which they arrive, and also based upon their perception of opportunities and barriers at the college.

Understanding the *routinized* forms of thought, speech, and action engaged by subordinates in an unequal system is important, because it is precisely within these generic processes that the power to change a system lies (Schwalbe 2001). Results of this study indicate the *alternate* racial identity standpoint is most effective in preserving and empowering subordinate identities, compared to the racial identity standpoints that attempt to "pass" as White, minimize, or deny the existence of racial categories, or accept the marginalized definition of being Black. Therefore, this group of Black students has the

greatest chance of challenging the system to redistribute educational access more equitably by race.

The educational pathways described by the respondents in this study expose the fallacy of the belief in duality between structure and actors. Educational persistence and achievement is not simply a matter of what an individual student chooses to do, and it is not simply a result of the social structure which surrounds the student. Challenging the reified nature of social systems (such as the predominantly White community college) and the reification of social categories (such as race) results in individuals—far from being caught in a duality—being positioned at the nexus of intersecting categories, experiences, influences, perspectives, and social structures.

Educational opportunity for, and success of, Black students at the predominantly White XYZ Community College are, in part, influenced by the pressures and opportunities presented by Black students within the structure, by the levels of self-efficacy with which these students enter the institution, and by their corresponding body projects and agentic performances. These pressures and opportunities, given some support from people with authority within the college system, have the potential to challenge the various levels of the predominantly White college structure by encouraging the college and its culture to shift from a White *habitus* to one that is more diverse, less colorblind, and more color-conscious.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore, from the perspectives of Black students at a predominantly White community college, barriers to accessing learning and opportunities to navigate these barriers. System access and process access refer to two different types of access to education. System access refers to getting in the door of educational institutions. Process access means that enrolling at the same college and in the same college courses result in all students (regardless of race or any other ascribed characteristic) receiving the same education and experience. This study focuses on issues of process access as perceived and described by Black student respondents at XYZ Community College.

This study, situated in an institution of higher education (community college) that serves a higher percentage of Black students than its four-year counterpart, is uniquely situated to shed new understanding on the persistence of the Black/White achievement gap in higher education. Uncovering the racial/educational experience of students in a gateway institution like the community college is important because it gives authority to marginalized voices within a system created, governed, and maintained by dominant voices. Listening to these voices is likely to produce unique insights, and shed new understanding on barriers tacitly or inadvertently created and maintained within the community college. Furthermore, this study attempts to uncover ways in which Black students respond to these barriers.

The findings indicate that being cast into the stereotype of the generic Black student was a salient barrier for all twenty-one respondents. Findings also indicate that Black students deal with this barrier in different ways, and that students' different approaches to navigating the barriers of this stereotype influence symbolic status hierarchies of which they are a part at this community college.

However, there are large differences between U.S.-born Blacks and African-born Blacks regarding their experiences of being Black and their aspects of racial identity. The degrees to which their respective countries of origin influence their lived experiences are partly responsible for such difference. Additionally, the moderate class backgrounds of newer African-born Black immigrants who plan to remain in the United States may influence the ways some respondents deal with barriers to learning (compared to earlier waves of African immigrants). Regardless of these differences, all Black respondents (U.S.-born and African-born) position themselves relative to the U.S. system of racial hierarchy in their attempts to navigate the common generic Black student stereotype.

The data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 reveal that the twenty-one respondents dealt with being cast into this negative stereotype in one of four ways. African-born Blacks navigated the environment of the predominantly White college from the racial identity standpoint I refer to as, *separation*, by attempting to distance themselves from U.S.-born Blacks. U.S.-born Blacks operated from the racial identity standpoint of *ambivalence*, typically by attempting to differentiate themselves from "pure Black" or "all Black" students, specifically by calling attention to their mixed-race heritage and by emphasizing the value of individual effort.

Both strategies of distancing by African-born Blacks and the type of differentiation described by mixed-race U.S.-born Blacks support a White college culture imbued with racial stereotypes. The difference between these two categories is that, through their distancing strategies, the African-born students actually create a symbolic status hierarchy based on race. This is accomplished by defining a separate place for themselves as Africans, located above U.S.-born Blacks in the racial hierarchy. Calling attention to, and actively

applying the stereotype of the generic Black student to U.S.-born Blacks, and by casting themselves as a "Black-White", or a "Black-European" via European language accents and styles of dress, the African-born respondents supported their placement on the racial hierarchy nearer to Whites and away from U.S.-born Blacks. The "mixed-race" U.S.-born Blacks who describe themselves as *ambivalent* to the stereotype of the generic Black student did not actively create such a race-based hierarchy, but by denying the existence of "problems of race now-a-days" (re: Andre), and by emphasizing that the best strategy to navigate a predominantly White college was by personal effort and merit, they actually provided a model for the dominant White system of the successful Black student—therefore, offering latent support for the existing White college system.

In addition to the distancing strategies used by African-born Blacks (*separation*) and U.S.-born Blacks who described themselves as *ambivalent* to the stereotype of the generic Black, U.S.-born Blacks who *reluctantly accepted* the stereotype also inadvertently supported the racial hierarchy upon which the college operates. These students, Aliyah and Darryl, described their efforts to access the learning on campus more in terms of merely "trying to make it through the term", or "existing as a Black surrounded by all these Whites". Since these students appeared to be the most challenged in terms of seeing themselves as efficacious or successful in a predominantly White environment, their actions frequently aligned with the stereotype of the generic Black student. Thus, they provide evidence to the dominant White system that problems with Black students emanate from the Black students themselves, erroneously indicating that it is the Black students who need to change (not the college system) to learn successfully at the college. Students operating from this racial

identity standpoint offer little challenge to the college system and, therefore, have little potential to challenge the race-based hierarchy existing at this college.

Only one group of students consistently described themselves in ways that indicated they were engaged in a continual process of rejecting the application of the stereotype of the generic Black student. I term this group, *alternate*, because through their strategies to navigate the predominantly White college system, they actively portray an alternate meaning of Blackness. Because they claim control over the definition of their color by rejecting the marginalized definition of Black foisted upon them by Whites, their presence and their actions have the potential to threaten the stability of racial hierarchies based on the privilege of Whiteness. Additionally, their strategies of accessing learning at the college (that is, code-switching, restraint, physical body products demonstrating Black pride, and parody of Black stereotypes) undermine the racial hierarchy without subordinating any other student of color.

As detailed in Chapter 5, the strategies of students who operate from the *alternate* racial identity standpoint, as well as those from *separation*, and to a degree, those from the standpoint of *ambivalence*, appeared to assist students' personal quests for more equitable access to learning on campus. However, unlike the other racial identity standpoints, *alternate*-minded students did not intentionally or inadvertently marginalize other Black students. *Alternate* strategies also seem to have the most potential to threaten the racial stereotypes upon which the dominant system depends, and by proxy, efficiently challenge the application of the stereotype (at least temporarily) to all Blacks on campus.

This study contributes to existing literature on race and education in a variety of ways. First, the results illuminate the role that negotiating one's place in racial hierarchies plays in either supporting or challenging hierarchies in an educational setting. Second, the

findings of this study have implications for change for students and employees at predominantly White community colleges. Third, the results help to inform theories on race and education, the relationship between structure and agency, and body theory. This chapter will explore these contributions to and opportunities for change in educational institutions that serve a disproportionate minority population.

Implications of Racial Identity

The strategies used by Black students from the racial identities of *separation*, *reluctant acceptance*, and *ambivalence* do not challenge the institutionalized stereotypes, practices, or expectations regarding race. Only the strategies enacted by Black students from the standpoint of an *alternate* racial identity have the potential to threaten the existing race-based practices at the college.

Racial Identity and Process Access

As previously discussed, Black students operating from the racial identity standpoints of *separation* and *alternate,* relative to students who *reluctantly accept* or who are *ambivalent* to the stereotype of the generic Black student, described perceiving that they have an ability to access the processes of learning once inside the doors of XYZ Community College. This belief in one's ability to access learning via self-directed action is otherwise known as, "agency". Agency requires actors to possess efficacy—the ability to make things happen through one's actions (Bandura 2001).

There are different types of agencies that have varying implications for individuals and structures. Hays (1994) discusses two types of agency, socially reproductive and socially transformational agency. An individual's actions may be considered socially reproductive

when they result in support for, or if they strengthen the established symbolic status hierarchy. Alternatively, transformational agency is any act that defies and questions the normative social symbolic order (Wang 2008).

The results of this study indicate African-born Blacks operating from the identity standpoint of *separation,* and U.S.-born Blacks operating from the standpoints of *reluctant acceptance* and *ambivalence* engage in socially reproductive agency in their quest to navigate a predominantly White college environment. Through such navigational strategies as skin bleaching, emphasis on their European connections, and "White" styles of dress, African-born Black students invoke the existing racial hierarchy, and create a place for themselves in this hierarchy above U.S.-born Blacks. Through their lack of challenge to the dominant system and their emphasis on individual achievement and irrelevance of racial categories, U.S.-born Blacks who *reluctantly accept* and those who are *ambivalent* to the stereotype of the generic Black student leave the existing racial hierarchy untouched, or inadvertently strengthen it.

According to Wang (2008), agency capable of liberating subordinated groups consists of two moments. The first moment entails rejecting the definition of one's self as prescribed by the dominant social order. For this rejection to be transformational, it needs to expose the falseness of the "natural" categories that define the subordinate actor's role. The second moment of transformational agency follows the first: it occurs when a capable person or group attempts to establish a competing symbolic status hierarchy, and is recognized or "actualized" by (Wang 2008) an actor for their acts of rejection of the current hierarchy. Therefore, while Black students who operate from the *alternate* racial identity standpoint pose challenges to institutionalized forms of racism, deep reform is only likely if dominant

actors within the college structure recognize these Black students' first moments of transformational agency, and take responsibility for subsequently initiating structural and procedural changes within the college.

In order to measure the significance of transformational agency on any given structure, it is important to understand the symbolic hierarchy upon which the social structure operates (Wang 2008). For example, in such racially based symbolic hierarchies as predominantly White colleges, race is obscured both by colorblind policies and a college culture imbued with the invisible privilege of Whiteness. Any act by a Black student that makes the stereotype of the generic Black student visible to Whites, and exposes this stereotype as blatantly inaccurate, is representative of this first moment of transformational agency. In essence, this first moment happens when dominant actors (White students and college employees) become unable to defend the "fit" of reified racial categories and associated roles to individual Black students.

For example, as Chapter 5 discusses, this potential is clearly evident in Raven's clowning and parody of the racial stereotype that "Black people love fried chicken". Her parody results in the students and teacher in the classroom becoming silent. This silence occurs presumably because her act of agency exposed the reified racial category of Black as, "an unstable and decentered complex of social meaning" (Omi and Winant 2004:116). Raven states that she "intentionally messes with Whites because it is needed" to make her more comfortable. Indeed, by calling forward racial stereotypes and presenting herself as indisputable evidence as to the inaccuracies of such stereotypes, she enacts the first moment of transformational agency. Likewise, Joseph's practice of intentionally dressing in different ways to "trip up" or "confuse" the Whites on campus regarding their stereotypes of how

Blacks look is indicative of his effort to make Whites aware of their stereotypes and the inaccuracies of these stereotypes. By presenting indisputable evidence that racial stereotypes are false, he forces Whites to see the fallacy of such racially based social orders.

Raven's and Joseph's actions are significant because they expose and contest race-based assumptions. Such actions allow Raven and Joseph, and students like them, to navigate the college environment unencumbered (temporarily at least) by racial stereotypes. This is an important step in shifting the culture of the college from colorblind to color conscious. In order for such transformational agentic acts to provide momentum for establishing an alternate social order, these types of acts need to be "actualized" by an actor capable of establishing a "competing discourse" (Wang 2008) upon which a new symbolic social order will be developed. The efficacious actions of Raven and Joseph are examples of such acts.

Such actions alone, however, are unlikely to be sufficient to create pervasive and permanent change in the institution. What is still needed for such actions to result in equal access to learning for all students regardless of race is for the institution to "actualize" these first moments of transformational agency. Ultimately, it is the institution's responsibility for creating a learning environment in which all students feel safe and empowered to initiate these challenges. Additionally, it is the institution's responsibility to remain sensitive to challenges to the status quo and to support powerful actors within the college system in their efforts to actualize first moments of transformational agency initiated by Black students.

In "Suggestions for Cultural and Structural Change within the Community College", I suggest other changes within the structure and culture of the community college to facilitate such institutional change. These suggestions include the development of White racial justice allies, who are dominant actors likely capable of establishing such competing discourse. In

addition to instituting structural and cultural shifts supportive of White racial justice allies within the college, the college needs to increase the number of Black employees, and implement racially conscious training programs. These types of changes will enable same-race and dominant-race actors to establish this type of competing discourse. Before discussing these suggested changes, I first speak to the theoretical contributions of this research and limitations and future research suggestions.

Theoretical Contributions

The results of this study add to the limited body of qualitative research on process access at the community college. Information gained from this study is important because it provides an understanding of Black student experiences *directly* via the words used by Black students as they describe barriers, and ways of circumventing such barriers, to learning at this understudied post-secondary institution.

Qualitative Research, Process Access, and the Community College

Much of the existing research on the community college has been quantitative in nature and has centered more on issues of system access and campus climate from the perspective of predominantly White administrators and predominantly White student populations (Maxwell and Shammas 2007). Given that the percentage of Black students at the community college is not found in transfer rates to four-year institutions, and also given that social and economic parity between races begins only after the attainment of a four-year degree, greater understanding of factors that preclude or enable matriculation from the community college is needed (Anderson et al. 2006; Dowd 2007). This research contributes such understanding by examining the barriers to process access and the ways Black students

navigate barriers within this understudied college environment.

Traditionally, research on student learning in higher education has taken place in four-year, well- to highly esteemed, post-secondary institutions that are congruent with U.S. society's normative definition of "good educational institutions". According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1998), this bias in what constitutes worthy college education and, therefore, what is worth researching and understanding, results in the community college often being forgotten or rendered invisible.

Given the increase in community college enrollment in recent decades, and in minority student enrollment in particular, there is a need to understand the opportunities and consequences of students attending this growing, but still marginalized educational institutional setting. The importance of gaining an understanding of minority students' experiences at predominantly White community colleges is underscored by demographic trends that show the proportion of racial and ethnic minority students doubling from 15.6 percent to 30.3 percent between 1976 and 1996. These numbers are projected to increase in the subsequent 25 years (Kee 1999). According to Flowers (2006), Blacks constituted 10 percent of the overall enrollment of two-year colleges and 8 percent of four-year institutions in 1980. By 2000, these numbers climbed to 12 percent and 11 percent, respectively. Overall, the community college is the port of entry for 40 percent of all Black college students (Hamilton 2003). Because these numbers are already large and are predicted to grow, the importance of understanding the experiences of Black students at the community college is underscored.

The data from this research suggests that a significant barrier to accessing the processes of learning inside the community college is the experience of being cast as an

undesirable “other” via the application of the stereotype of the generic Black student. All twenty-one student respondents reported encountering this barrier. While the perception of such a barrier was common among all respondents, there was significant variation regarding how they dealt with this barrier.

This research uniquely uses the voices of Black student respondents to illuminate ways in which racial identity standpoints connect with Black students’ perceptions of such barriers to learning within a White educational structure. Importantly, this study addresses a gap in prior research by using the perceived and described realities of Black students via the words used by the Black students themselves, as they navigated a predominantly White community college as part of a four-year educational trajectory. Because this study presents the actual words used by Black students as evidence of their experiences accessing learning on campus, and because this study proposes connections between the predominantly White college structure, individual racial identity standpoints, and navigational strategies of Black students, it provides a much needed understanding of the connections between institutional structure, racial identity, and minority students’ persistence and achievement, as described by the students themselves.

Relationship between Actors and Structure

This research contributes to recent theoretical work on educational systems as being more than reified, static entities that affect actors in a one-way fashion. Such theorizing views structures and actors as mutually interdependent: structures inform actors’ options and choices, while actors’ choices affect structures (Bandura 2001; Giddens 1984; Sewell 1992). Such a view dismisses the idea of a lack of connection between remote socio-cultural and

environmental structures, and such internal human processes as perception, motivation, efficacy, and behavior patterns.

Endowed with various resources and strategies for action, actors exist within structures. Actors are "knowledgeable" when they possess cultural schemas congruent with the rules of operation of the structure. Therefore, to be "knowledgeable" is to be most capable of action, or most agentic, within a given structure (Sewell 1992). The data gained from the Black students in this study suggest a relationship between type of racial identity standpoint and being, "knowledgeable", or most agentic. Specifically, Black students who *separate* from, are *ambivalent* to, or who present an *alternate* definition of, what it means to be Black described perceiving the greatest opportunities to work within the predominantly White environment of XYZ Community College.

Structures consist of ordinary operations that are arguably more familiar to, and more easily navigated by "ordinary" knowledgeable actors. Although it is the normative actors (that is, White) who possess the most recognizable cultural schemas (that is, resources) and, therefore, who can most easily generate transformations of the operations of the structure, Black actors can also play a role in the generation of new patterns or in the continuance of existing patterns of operation (Schwalbe et al. 2000; Sewell 1992, Wang 2008).

Because of historical racial classifications, Black students at a predominantly White college have unequally weighted resources and, therefore, different strategies for accessing learning than White students. All actors in this predominantly White college system have the ability to act agentically. Because of unequal positioning by race, however, the type and amount of agency expressed is strongly influenced by type of racial identity standpoint. While the actual consequences of enacting agency on the structure of the college remain

unknown, this study does suggest that Black students describe a greater freedom to navigate the learning environment when they perceive they have the ability to act agentically.

As previously mentioned, agency can be socially reproductive or transformational. An individual's actions may be considered socially reproductive when they result in support, or when they strengthen the established symbolic status hierarchy. Alternatively, transformational agency is any act that defies and questions the normative social symbolic order (Wang 2008).

Transformational agency has two moments—moments that the students in this study exemplified. The first moment, capable of destabilizing hierarchical systems based on race if recognized by a second moment, was uniquely expressed by Black students who operated from the *alternate* racial identity standpoint. The findings of this study suggest that Black students with this type of *alternate* racial identity were closer than Black students from other racial identity standpoints to affecting change in the structure of the college. This group of respondents described enacting the first moment of transformational agency, which resulted in a temporary lifting of the barrier of the stereotype of the generic Black student. What remains unknown is whether these moments of agency were recognized by more powerful actors within the college. Furthermore, if they were recognized, it remains unknown whether such recognition proved to be consequential for the structure of the college. This recognition, the second moment of transformational agency, is necessary for change in the race-based college structure, and ultimately for equality of access to learning by all students. The second moment had not occurred by the time of this writing.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

Racial identity development is a life-long process. The data from this study indicate a connection between racial identity standpoints, level of success associated with strategies used to access processes of learning within the college environment, and preliminary challenges to the Whiteness of the college structure. While an understanding of the relationship between current racial identity and perceived access to learning is gained by this study, what remains unknown is the connection between previous educational and life experiences and perceived ability to navigate this particular community college environment. This understanding is important because, although it is clear that the student respondents arrived with and used different resources to navigate the White college environment, an understanding of the origin of these resources also has important implications for educational attainment.

Overall, results should be interpreted cautiously. Because in-depth information regarding race, perceptions of barriers to learning, and ways to navigate these barriers was gathered on relatively few (sample size of twenty-one) Black students, care should be exercised in generalizing these findings to all students and campuses. Indeed, more research needs to be done at community colleges to account for different community and structural demographics, such as densely populated urban areas with higher minority concentrations, and those in coastal regions of the United States. To be sure, type and density of minority concentration may vary by locale. Issues of process access in community colleges in the Southwest region of the United States, for example, may be experienced by higher numbers of Latino students. Likewise, in urban areas in the Southern United States, much higher proportions of student populations might be U.S.-born Black. Still other regions may host

significant numbers of students of Asian or Native American descent. While all of these different student groups may experience being thrust into stereotypes by Whites at their respective colleges, these stereotypes vary in meaning and consequences, based not only on personal interpretation, but also by the socio-historical meanings of the various racial categories. Because of this complexity, it cannot be assumed that navigational processes used by the Black student respondents in this study would be adapted by other racial groups, and in other locales, but there may be some similarities.

The results of this study are informative regarding Black students perceptions of their ability to navigate a predominantly White community college, but since educational attainment of a four-year degree seems to be the standard for parity of quality of life indicators for Blacks and Whites, research on the connections between racial identity and matriculation from the community college is needed. A longitudinal study that follows Black community college students through the attainment of the baccalaureate degree could illuminate important ways in which these students navigate the two- and four-year systems, and facilitate successful transitions.

This study uses phenomenological and grounded theory methodology. Because both methodologies are inductive and utilize heuristic inquiry, this combination enabled great depth of understanding of the respondents' perceptions and for the discovery of patterns across respondents' experiences. Because such methods rely on individual perception, I cannot speak to those beyond their awareness. They may have other resources or privileges, but the methodologies of phenomenology and grounded theory focus strictly on respondents' expressed perceptions, and therefore exclude consideration of other identity markers.

Additionally, a greater understanding is needed regarding the ways multi-racial students navigate learning environments at predominantly White colleges. In order to participate in this study, student respondents self identified as Black or African American. However, during the course of the three interview sequence, a group emerged consisting of students who initially indicated their race as Black/African American (even though a multi-racial option was available on the recruitment form, Appendix A), but who described their understanding of their identity as being mixed-race or multi-racial. This group navigated the learning environment of the college from a racial identity standpoint I call, *ambivalent*—which means that, despite encountering frequent situations in which they perceived being confronted with the stereotype of the generic Black student, they attempted to navigate this barrier by denying existence of racial categories. In doing so, they described a process in which they presented themselves either as non-Black, of ambiguous race, or as more White, and emphasized non-raced individual achievement as the most probable avenue for personal academic success.

The strategy of de-emphasizing racial categories is discussed at length in the literature on multi-racial students and higher education (Campbell 2009, 2007; Herman 2009; Yancy 2006). This study indicates a gap in understanding the dynamics surrounding students who initially and firmly identify as Black (even when a multi-racial category is given) but who, in the course of extended discussions regarding their racial identity and pathways through educational systems, argue the existence of a mixed-race identity. This understanding is important, because it indicates the presence of a racial identity that “floats” between a mono-racial identity of Black and a multi-racial identity.

Educational policy based on research that views student racial identity as mostly static misses this group of Black/mixed-race students. Because their strategies of accessing learning is close to multi-racial students, but their racial "sense of self" may be closer to Black, these students may be more likely to develop an *alternate* racial identity than those students who initially and continually identify as multi-racial. Understanding the probability of developing an *alternate* identity is important because, as indicated by my data, only the *alternate* identity has the potential to change the dominant system and construct an educational system available to all students regardless of race.

Suggestions for Cultural and Structural Change within the Community College

A great deal of the literature on race and education discusses the connections between Black students' perceived ability to access the processes of learning at the collegiate level and positive learning outcomes (such as persistence, elevated GPA, and graduation) and positive life outcomes associated with graduation from a four-year college (such as increased longevity, lower stress, and higher life-time earnings) (Barnhouse Walters 1999; Campbell 2009; hooks 1994; Rankin and Reason 2005). Because a disproportionate number of Black college students start at the community college, and also because equal access to the system of education is an integral part of the community college's mission, efforts must be made to address race-related barriers to equal access to learning.

Importantly, the community college is in a unique position to serve as a role model for the larger system of higher education, to prove that complete and equal access to learning can be availed to all students, regardless of race. Stereotyping is not an individual phenomenon: it happens in patterns and undermines the humanity of large numbers of

people. The finding that all respondents in this study encountered such a barrier to learning at XYZ community college suggests a phenomenon that college administrators would want to correct.

From a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, the college has a moral (not to mention, legal) obligation to address this barrier. A central tenet of CRT is that racism is normal in American society, and is therefore present in all American institutions, including education. Social constructs, such as meritocratic beliefs, colorblind ideology, and the normalizing function of Whiteness, render this fact invisible. Additionally, CRT positions the narratives of people of color as powerful and necessary tools to expose racism's centrality to experiences of everyday life in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings 1998; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1997). This research gives voice to Black students experiences, which is the first step in debunking colorblindness and meritocratic myths that race does not matter anymore. As such, race and the current condition of racism become central to the discussion of equal access to education.

Many administrators of community colleges erroneously believe that the institution has enabled equal access to education by providing system access. Because of such beliefs and a truncated understanding of both system and process access, additional efforts need to be made at this particular post-secondary level in order to ensure matriculation to the four-year level, and by extension, equal life outcomes by race. Such efforts need to address the current reality of racial hegemony at XYZ community college as being central to any discourse on institutional change.

Community colleges, as gateway institutions, were specifically designed to offer equal access to college for all citizens with the intent of equal educational outcomes for all

students. Indeed, such overt policies as open admission and affordable tuition are specifically designed to address barriers to educational access frequently encountered by disadvantaged populations. However, the results of this study support other studies that found that these policies fall far short of this goal of availing true and equal access to education for all students. While all twenty-one respondents stated that they were able to get in the college doors, each of them described facing a common barrier once they attempted to access the processes of learning. Therefore, there is a contradiction between the goal of this community college to avail equal educational access and the Black students' experiences (described by all twenty-one respondents) of encountering race-related barriers to accessing learning.

This study reveals that all respondents experienced the same barrier: being forced into the negative stereotype of the generic Black student. Because this stereotype partially emanates from the ways in which the college operates, the college is morally and legally obligated to address this barrier to provide educational opportunities for all, and to be congruent with its mission. In order to ensure that this action happens, the college board of directors and upper-level administration need to do the following:

1) Become aware the privilege of Whiteness upon which the college's colorblind policies are based.
2) Implement real and permanent changes to the current operating policies of the college, so that these policies truly value the experiences of all students equally, regardless of race.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, both system and process access need to be availed to all students in order to accomplish true and equal educational opportunities. This study is particularly concerned with issues of process access. Because it is necessary to address

barriers to process access, the specific mechanisms that curtail process access for Black students in predominantly White institutions need to be changed. These mechanisms include *cultural hegemony*, use of a *dominant, colorblind curriculum*, the *perceptions Black students have of White faculty members* and the *Whiteness of the college*. In order to address these mechanisms, it is paramount that the invisible privilege of Whiteness, upon which the college's colorblind policies are based, be exposed. However, in order for colorblindness to be exposed, race and racism need to be positioned centrally to discussions regarding student access to learning. From a CRT perspective, in the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 would contribute significantly to an awareness of the pervasiveness of White privilege and colorblind practices on XYZ's campus. Acknowledging the voices of Black students regarding the barriers they face at this predominantly White campus would also contribute to an understanding of the pernicious effects of these practices on Black students' struggle to access learning at XYZ.

All twenty-one respondents of this study, to some degree, referenced the existence of a race-based hierarchy at the college. They identified this hierarchy as a barrier to be navigated to access the system of learning successfully. Their descriptions of encounters with this barrier challenge the normative assumption that XYZ Community College, as an educational institution, is race-neutral and equally accessible to everyone. They also perceived this hierarchy to be invisible to the White administrators, workers, and students at the college. The college administration needs to become aware of their invisible White privilege and the colorblind policies that are predicated upon this privilege. In other words, they need to become "privilege cognizant" in order to implement necessary changes to address the lack of educational equality by race on this campus (Reason, Millar, and Scales

2005).

Second, real and permanent changes to the current operating policies of the college are necessary for all students, regardless of race, to have equal access to education. These include:

1) Changing the physical and cultural landscape of the college

2) Changing institutional policies and practices to enrich Black students experiences

Changing the Physical and Cultural Landscape of the College

Because perception, to a large degree, dictates individual reality, the community college at a very basic level needs to implement "symbolic" visual changes (Rankin and Reason 2005). Such changes need to reflect a commitment to valuing diversity throughout the structure of the college by including real and in-depth statements of diversity awareness, both in mission statements and the college's strategic plan (which outlines the college's plans).

In addition to changes in the "look" of written policy and practices, visual evidence of the college's commitment to valuing diversity should be represented by a racially diverse administration, staff, faculty, and student body. Racial demographic composition of employees and students is equal in importance to the structure of the college as are perceptions and experiences of Black students regarding process access.

According to Rankin and Reason (2005), a visible presence of a racially diverse faculty and student population positively affects a Black student's perception of belonging and sense of efficacy. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, most of the Black respondents in this study experienced the converse of racially diverse classrooms by being the only Black student in most of their classes. Common strategies enacted by respondents to deal with

being the only Black student in a class, specifically from *ambivalent* and *separate* racial identity standpoints, included attempts to reduce their appearance of being Black (hiding their hair and bleaching their skin, respectively). Strategies enacted by students who operate from an *alternate* racial identity standpoint included practicing restraint, and thereby remained silent during class discussions. These strategies are time and effort consuming, and detract from being involved in processes of learning in the classroom at similar levels afforded to White students. In order to address this inequality in classroom experience, the college should increase recruitment and retention of Black students on campus.

Because of the predominance of White faculty at this college, very few of the respondents reported having taken a class from an instructor of color. However, those who did enroll in classes taught by instructors of color described being able to more freely express ideas and more in control of their own learning. For example, Sera described a class in which she gave a speech on the topic of "Whupping". She described this topic as coinciding with her African roots, and she also perceived it to be connected to child discipline practices of U.S.-born Blacks. Upon giving her speech, her White peers challenged the appropriateness of her topic. She described feeling ostracized by her classmates until her teacher spoke up for her.

> **Sera**: When I made my speech on whupping, it was something that was valuable to me, and I felt like they (White students) didn't understand me. They didn't understand where I was coming from. They really came down on me, I just felt like I wasn't understood. I was angry for a little bit, but when my teacher backed me up, it made me feel a whole lot comfortable. He backed me up by mentioning his own experience because his dad was African American and his mom was white. So when I

> feel accepted by the teacher, and it's easier when the teacher is something other than White, nobody else matters in the class.

Sera's experience illustrates the value of having a racially diverse faculty. Additionally, it illustrates the connections between perceptions of belonging and safety, levels of efficacy, access to learning and, therefore, equal access to education by race.

Changing Institutional Policies and Practices to Enrich Black Students' Experiences

In addition to recruiting and retaining employees and students of color, and implementing symbolic changes that show a visible commitment to diversity, this college needs to implement *real* changes to the culture of the college. These changes need to be reflective of a new culture of race-consciousness that supplants the old culture of colorblind policy, structures, and ways of teaching and learning that ignore the existence of racial diversity and issues of race. The old college culture is perceived by the Black respondents in this study as being colorblind, unsafe, and supportive of the stereotype of the generic Black student—in other words, as a barrier to equal access to learning.

Specifically, the college needs to financially support race-conscious diversity awareness initiatives, curriculum, and course requirements. Race-conscious initiatives, as opposed to colorblind initiatives that erroneously treat race as something that does not matter anymore, draw attention to the effects of unequal and race-based structures on the lived experiences of Blacks. Such initiatives and requirements are important, since illuminating the various inequalities Blacks confront daily is the first step in exposing the fallacy of colorblindness, and enables the race-based status hierarchy, or status quo, at XYZ Community College to be more accessible to all.

Because XYZ Community College is a predominantly White college, not unlike most

campuses of higher education in the United States, addressing barriers to learning, as well as opportunities for Black students to access learning, requires a collegiate cultural change that is inclusive of the students of color *and* Whites on campus. White college employees and students need to be encouraged to adopt a racial justice ally perspective. Such a perspective challenges daily practices within the college classrooms and the wider college environment that privilege Whites over students of color. Shifting an institutional culture from colorblind to critically race-conscious requires real and daily advocacy work from Blacks as well as Whites on campus, and focuses on working against the system of oppression that maintains White power (Reason et al. 2005; Wang 2008).

In order to equally and effectively teach *all* students, instructors need to posses cultural critical consciousness and be taught how to effectively teach from such critically conscious perspectives (Gay, Kirkland 2003). Because the vast majority of teachers in the United States are educated in U.S. institutions that are color-blind White structures, most teachers lack formal education in what critical awareness is or how to teach from a critically conscious perspective. There is little this community college can do to change the pedagogy through which instructors of this college have been educated, but, the community college *can* engage in regular in-service and workshop training initiatives to teach such awareness. In order to effectively challenge the invisible White privilege on this campus, instructors must be critically conscious and therefore to be able to recognize the second moment of transformational agency. Such training requires an ongoing commitment from the college administration to teach instructors how to become critically aware and then to guide them in the practice of implementing critically conscious pedagogy in their classrooms.

Ensuring that *all* faculty are trained in and accepting of the concept of critical

diversity is key to setting "intellectual and behavioral norms" (Rankin and Reason 2005:58) that are reflective of color-consciousness, and which allow the racial status quo to be challenged (Stage 1999). White students need coursework focused on a critical examination of race relations and the privilege of Whiteness. By establishing this type of race-conscious curriculum, the faculty plays an important role in creating a campus climate that de-centers normative assumptions and practices based on White privilege and colorblindness. Additionally, Black students and other students of color, in order to connect with course content, need coursework that has been filtered through perspectives which represent not only the dominant White consciousness, but through all other consciousnesses representative of racial and other subordinate groups.

In addition to this type of race-conscious curriculum, efforts from college administrators regarding the promotion of effective interracial interactions on campus, such as roommate pairings, also promote a shift in college culture from colorblind to racially conscious (Rankin and Reason 2005). As outlined in the previous discussion on reproductive and transformational agency, this type of *critical* awareness provides racial dominants, as well as those who are racially subordinate, with an institutionally sanctioned way overtly to recognize acts by conscious, *alternate*, Black students at this predominantly White college (Wang 2008).

Chapter Summary

The results of this study indicate a gap between the mission of the community college to offer equal education to all students and lived experiences of Black students at this college. All twenty-one Black student respondents described encountering the race-based barrier of

being forced into the stereotype of the generic Black student when attempting to access learning at this college. All twenty-one respondents reported being concerned about this barrier, and described enacting various strategies as they attempted to navigate it. Additionally, all of the students in this study talked about valuing educational attainment as a means to higher earnings, better jobs, and a general increase in quality of life.

Advancing the narratives of these respondents begins the process of removing the cloak of colorblindness and of exposing racism as normal in contemporary society. In order for this community college to provide equal access to learning for all students, the normative perspective of racism needs to be in the foreground of all discussions. Specifically, racism must be considered in discussions that inform policy formulation and implementation within the structure of the college, the curriculum, and all other learning experiences in and outside the classroom. For the college to conceptualize this as a necessary shift, academic discourse and curriculum need to be understood as real property and as such, legally required to be equally availed to all students. The most likely place for these changes to occur, according to CRT, would be at the intersections of the interests of Whites and people of color (Ladson-Billings 1998). This is the process of interest convergence.

This study documents and analyzes continual incidences of racism in the form of racial stereotypes on the campus of XYZ Community College. These incidences of racism block the equal educational access required by law. Exposing the failure of the college to comply with this legal mandate may provide an opportunity for interest convergence. For example, it may be in the best interest of the college administration to address such race-based inequality and, in the best interest of students of color, to coalesce as a group around this shared lived experience. Such coherence would enable the college to address and amend

claims of objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy. Only when opportunities for interest convergence are identified and acted upon could *real and substantive changes* be successfully implemented.

In order for the college to fulfill the legal requirement to provide equal access to education, the college needs to implement comprehensive, racially conscious curriculum requirements, and consistent and positive interracial interactions. Additionally, I propose an increase in employees, faculty, and students of color. As indicated by the scholarship on race, higher education, and CRT, these changes would benefit members of the dominant culture, as well as students of color (Rankin and Reason 2005). Embracing such an opportunity, which is beneficial for Whites and Blacks, is at the heart of a critical race framework (Ladson-Billings 1998). Likewise, having racial justice allies throughout all levels of the college to support transformational agentic acts (Wang 2008) (such as those *alternate* acts exhibited by the U.S.-born Blacks' body projects, described in Chapter 5) compels predominantly White institutions toward a model whose goal is, indeed, equitable access to learning for all students.

APPENDIX A:
RESEARCH RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Principal Researcher: Jill Knapp Moravek

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the experience of African American/Black Community College students as they attend a White Community College.

The benefit of this research is that the information gained in this study can be used by various institutitons such as the community college to help meet the needs of frequently subordinated ethnic student populations. This study may provide information to help equalize college student's experiences within structures of higher education.

1) Please indicate your age: _____younger than 18 _____18 years or older

If you checked 18 years or older, please proceed to question #2.

2) How do you identify racially / ethnically?:

_____ African American or Black

_____ American or Native American

_____ Asian

_____ Latino/a or Hispanic

_____Multi-racial

_____ White

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research. If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately two months and will involve two to

three interviews which will consist of up to three hours for each interview. During the study you will be asked to verbalize your experiences at the college. **All information will be kept confidential and you will be able to stop your participation at any time.**

3) If selected, I would be willing and able to participate:

_____ Yes

_____ No

If you answered yes to question #2, please provide the following information:

Name_____

Phone numbers: (daytime) _____ (cell) _____ (evening) _____

e-mail address: _____

APPENDIX B: TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Principal Researcher: Jill Knapp Moravek

Principal Researcher identifies self when phone is answered: "This is Jill Moravek from XYZ Community College doing research through Iowa State University. May I speak to _____ *(name of student identified on the research recruitment questionnaire)*?"

When respondent identifies self: "I have a research recruitment questionnaire which you filled out in _____class on _____ (*date*) indicating your willingness to participate in a series of up to three face-to-face interviews over the next two months. As stated on the questionnaire, this research is aimed at gaining an understanding of the experience of African American/Black college students as they attend a White Community College. I am calling to confirm your willingness to participate and to set up a time for the initial interview".

(*Pause to hear the response from the potential interviewee*).

If the response is a refusal: "Thank you for your time. The information you provided on the questionnaire will be kept confidential for the length of the study and then destroyed by January 1st of 2009".

If the response is affirmative: “The first interview will be one to three hours long. I will be going over a consent form you will need to sign and then I will be asking you to talk about your experience as a student at Western Iowa Tech. Can I answer any questions you may have at this point” (*pause and answer if there are any*).

Set up a date, time and place to have the interview. Give the student my contact information in case they need to get in touch with me prior to the interview.

“Thank you for your time (*confirm interview time, date and place*) good-bye”.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: **The Experience of Being African American at a White Community College**

Investigator: Jill Knapp Moravek

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experience of African American Community College students as they attend a White Community College. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a current student at Western Iowa Tech Community College, are 18 years of age or older and have identified yourself as African American.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately two months and will involve two to three interviews which will consist of up to three hours for each interview. During the study you will be asked to verbalize your experiences at the college.

With your permission, each interview will be audio taped. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

Risks are minimal, but could include discomfort regarding questions about experiences related to race. There will be a list of professionals you could contact if you are upset and would like to talk about what you are feeling. This list includes the name and number of the campus counselor and the Sociology Department Chair.

XYZ Community College student counselor:	Penny Schempp
	(712) 274-6400 X1293
XYZ Community College Sociology Department Chair:	Cindy Zortman
	(712) 274-6400 X1351

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study, there may not be direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing information to colleges and other educational institutions which may be incorporated into the policies and practices of the colleges to help to better meet the needs of African American student populations. This study may provide information to help equalize college student's experiences within structures of higher education.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying respondents will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Only the researcher will have access to the data. Audio tapes and interview transcripts will be labeled with a case number only. As this study may require the researcher to contact the respondents for a follow up interview, the contact information that corresponds to each case number will be stored in a separate locked drawer in a different location than the audio tapes or interview transcripts. Consent forms will not contain case numbers or contact

information. The consent forms and audio tapes will be stored in separate locked drawers in the reserachers office. Interview transcrips and contact information will be stored in a separate locked drawer in the researchers home office. Psuedonyms will be used for any reporting of the interview data. Recordings will be erased by January first of 2009. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Jill Knapp Moravek at (712) 898-6200.
- **Major Professors: Dr. Sharon Bird**
  sbird@iastate.edu
  Department of Sociology
  217 B East Hall
  Iowa State University

  Dr. Alicia Cast
  acast@iastate.edu
  Department of Sociology
  107 East Hall
  Iowa State University

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 50011.

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PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____ _____

(Participant's Signature) (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____ _____

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) (Date)

APPENDIX D. LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE CALENDAR OF EXPERIENCE WITH SPECIFIC MICRO, MESO, AND MACRO STRUCTURES

Participant Case Number _____ Date of Birth _____

Page 1 of 4	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
1. Education											
Pre-Primary											
Secondary											
Post Secondary											
2. Family											
Orientation											
Procreation											
3. Living Arrangements											
Urban											
Rural											
4. Religion											
5. Employment											
6. Interaction with Legal Institutions											
7. Health Care											
8. Organizational Memberships											

Page 2 of 4	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
1. Education											
Pre-Primary											
Secondary											
Post Secondary											
2. Family											
Orientation											
Procreation											
3. Living Arrangements											
Urban											
Rural											
4. Religion											
5. Employment											
6. Interaction with Legal Institutions											
7. Health Care											
8. Organizational Memberships											

Page 3 of 4	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
1. Education											
Pre-Primary											
Secondary											
Post Secondary											
2. Family											
Orientation											
Procreation											
3. Living Arrangements											
Urban											
Rural											
4. Religion											
5. Employment											
6. Interaction with Legal Institutions											
7. Health Care											
8. Organizational Memberships											

Page 4 of 4	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
1. Education						
Pre-Primary						
Secondary						
Post Secondary						
2. Family						
Orientation						
Procreation						
3. Living Arrangements						
Urban						
Rural						
4. Religion						
5. Employment						
6. Interaction with Legal Institutions						
7. Health Care						
8. Organizational Memberships						

APPENDIX E: PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT AT A WHITE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Researcher: Jill Knapp Moravek

Initial interview

Semi-structured, open-ended audio taped interview: Participant case number_____.

_____ Brief overview of the study verbally provided

_____ 2 Consent forms signed; one given to participant, one kept by researcher.

_____ Audio recorder turned on and verbal consent of participant recorded.

_____ Any questions the participant has, have been answered

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Position of participant and researcher:

* I engage in the Epoche process so that to a significant degree, past associations, understanding, facts, and biases are set aside and do not color or direct the interview.

*Begin with a social conversation or brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere.

Central question: How do Black students **perceive** and **describe** their **experience** of being **African American or Black** at a **White community college**?

'How' is important because it indicates my willingness to be open about whatever emerges from conversations with the respondents (co-researchers).

'Perceive' is important because it is tapping into their personal understandings or realities about their experience of being of a historically marginalized race in a dominate race institution. It illustrates that this experience is individualized and unique due to race being a social construction, but one with wider historical underpinnings.

'**Describe'** refers to what race means and what it is for the respondents.

'Experience' is a way of emphasizing the fact that I will be seeking comprehensive stories from the respondents; how they perceive and describe the experience of race in their everyday lives.

'African American/Black and White' identifies the perception and experience of two social categories I am interested in gaining an understanding of.

'Community College' identifies the type of structure the experience is taking place in.

Demographic Questions:

1) How long have you been at XYZ Community College?

2) Where are the different places you have lived prior to coming to XYZ Community College?

3) What was the racial composition of the different schools/colleges and/or communities you have lived in?

4) How important is race in your everyday life? What makes race either less or more important to you?

Topic and Issue Questions:

1) Try to remember one of the last times you were aware of your race while on the XYZ campus and tell me about the situation; what was happening, how you felt and what you did.

This first question is really my "QUESTION". The rest of the interview is to flow in dialogue form from this question according to the phenomenological grounded theory approaches; with additional questions being asked spontaneously during the interview. If clarification or fuller descriptions are necessary, I have the following seven questions to use as prompts.

2) How frequently are you 'aware' of race on campus; either yours or that of others around you?

3) What dimensions, incidents and people intimately connected with experiences of being aware of race stand out to you?

4) How does this awareness of race affect you? What changes (physical, emotional, cognitive, etc.) do you associate with these experiences?

5) What feelings are generated by these experiences of being aware of race?

6) What bodily changes or states do you associate with being aware of race?

7) Does your awareness of race at college affect others around you? If so, how?

8) Have you shared all that is significant with reference to experiences of race on campus?

9) What is your perception as to what XYZ Community College as a college should or could do regarding polices affecting race?

	age	country of origin	current SES	gender	inner city experience	negative police interaction	race, heritage	race, preference	skin shade	youth SES
#6 Amelia	31	"Congo"	"middle"	"F"	"no"	"no"	"African"	"Black African"	"med. dark"	"middle"
#4 Karen	28	"Kenya"	"working poor"	"F"	"no"	"no"	"African"	"Black African"	"dark"	"middle"
#2 Sera	21	"Rwanda"	"working/ lower middle"	"F"	"no"	"yes"	"African"	"Black African"	"med. dark"	"upper middle"
#13 Savina	31	"Togo"	"working poor"	"F"	"no"	"yes"	"African"	"Black African"	"dark"	"middle"
#7 Chris	41	"Togo"	"working/ lower middle"	"M"	"no"	"yes"	"African"	"Black African"	"dark"	"middle"
#8 Alex	38	"Togo"	"working/ lower middle"	"M"	"no"	"no"	"African"	"Black African"	"dark"	"upper middle"
#9 Noah	25	"Nigeria"	"working/ lower middle"	"M"	"no"	"no"	"African"	"Black African"	"dark"	"middle"
#10 Jazmin	23	"USA"	"working/ lower middle"	"F"	"yes"	"no"	"Black, White, Native"	"African American"	"med”.	"middle"
#12 Tora	27	"USA"	"working poor"	"F"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black and Native"	"Black, mixed or Native"	"light"	"working poor"
#18 Nikki	28	"USA"	"working poor"	"F"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black"	"African American"	"med”.	"working/lower middle"
#20 Trina	26	"USA"	"working poor"	"F"	"yes"	"no"	"Black"	"African American"	"med”.	"working/lower middle"
#22 Aliyah	31	"USA"	"working poor"	"F"	"no"	"no"	"Black and Native"	"Black"	"med”.	"middle"
#5 Raven	30	"USA"	"working/ lower middle"	"F"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black"	"African Am. or Black"	"med. dark"	"working/lower middle"
#16 Robert	18	"USA"	"working poor"	"M"	"yes"	"no"	"Black"	"African American"	"dark"	"working/lower middle"

#11 William	44	"USA"	"middle"	"M"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black"	"African American"	"dark"	"middle"
#14 Joseph	21	"USA"	"working poor"	"M"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black and Native"	"African American"	"med”.	"working/lower middle"
#15 Darryl	34	"USA"	"working/ lower middle"	"M"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black"	"African American"	"dark"	"working/lower middle"
#1 Andre	20	"USA"	"working/ lower middle"	"M"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black, White, Native"	"African American"	"v. light"	"middle"
#17 Tyler	28	"USA"	"working/ lower middle"	"M"	"no"	"yes"	"Black and White"	"Black"	"light"	"working/lower middle"
#3 Joshua	18	"USA"	"working poor"	"M"	"yes"	"no"	"Black and Native"	"Black, mixed or Native"	"light"	"working/lower middle"
#19 Jamal	48	"USA"	"working poor"	"M"	"yes"	"yes"	"Black"	"African American"	"med. dark"	"working/lower middle"

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END NOTES

[1]The major provision of the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution was to grant citizenship to all people born or naturalized in the United States of America, thereby granting citizenship to slaves. The 14th amendment was also intended to extend the Bill of Rights to all citizens. (www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/14thamendment.html).

[2]Supreme Court of the United States in Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee county, KS et al. Briggs et al. v. Elliott et al. Davis et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, VA et al. Gebhart et al. v. Belton et al. Now. 1,2,4,10. Reargued Dec. 7,8,9, 1953. Decided May 17, 1954. Reargued April 11,12,13 and 14, 1955. Decided May 31, 1955.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren held that "segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprives the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, in contravention of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to (retard) the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial(ly) integrated school system. Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of Plessy v. Ferguson, this fining is amply supported by modern authority. Any language in Plessy v. Ferguson contrary to this finding is rejected" (Warren, Westlaw 2008).

In 1955, the Supreme Court required the defendants of the 1954 cases to make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance with the May 1954 ruling.

[3]1965 Acts and Joint Resolutions passed at the regular session of the sixty-first general assembly of the state of Iowa: "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state of Iowa and the purpose of this Act to provide for the establishment of not more than twenty areas which shall include all of the area of the state and which may operate either area vocational schools or area community colleges offering to the greatest extent possible, educational opportunities and services in each of the following, when applicable, but not necessarily limited to: 1. The first two years of college work including pre-professional education. 2. Vocational and technical training. 3. Programs for in-service training and retraining of workers. 4. Programs for high school completion for students of post-high school age. 5. Programs for all students of high school age who may best serve themselves by enrolling for vocational and technical training while also enrolled in local high school, public or private. 6. Student personnel services. 7. Community services. 8. Vocational education for persons who have academic, socio-economic, or other handicaps which prevent succeeding in regular vocational education programs. 9. Training, retraining, and all necessary preparation for productive employment of all citizens" (Barlow 1965; Chapter 274).

[4]1995 Act to Amend the Iowa Code for Community College, now revised to be State Code 260C. Revision 260C.29 "Academic Incentives for Minorities Program-mission. The mission of the Academic Incentives for Minorities Program established in this section is to encourage collaborative efforts by community colleges, the institutions of higher learning under the control of the state board of regents, and business and industry to enhance educational opportunities and provide for job creation ad career advancement for Iowa's minorities by providing assistance to minorities who major in fields or subject areas where minorities are currently under-represented or underutilized" (2007 State of Iowa Code 260C.29). The CC shall employ a director for the program who will recruit minority students into the program and will nurture business/community links for students who successfully complete the program. Tuition, fees and books will be paid by the program for qualifying minorities (Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaskan Native American).

[5]In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court justices decided on two different but similar cases—they voted 5-4 to uphold the University of Michigan's law school affirmative action policy in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which favors minorities. But in a 6-3 vote, the justices struck down the affirmative action policy for undergraduate admissions in *Gratz v. Bollinger*, which awards 20 points for Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans on an admissions rating scale, saying that it was too similar to a quota system and too narrow of an equalizing program to be in line with the university's diversity initiative.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was the eventual deciding vote in *Grutter* (the University of Michigan Law school case), saying that affirmative action is still needed in America, but indicated her hope was that 25 years from now, affirmative action and other such equalizing programs would no longer be necessary to level the playing field between races.

[6]In referencing race, the terms, "African American" and "Black" are often used interchangeably, interpreted as synonymous and generally confused. For the purpose of this research, the term, "Black" will be used to refer to people who are perceived by the dominant "White" culture to be of African descent and who see themselves categorized as African American or Black by White culture.

"Black" is the preferred term because it incorporates all members of the African Diaspora, and is more equal or congruent with the term, "White". According to Tatum (1997), the use of the term, "African American" suggests a narrow heritage. The term, "Black" includes people in the United States with a slave history, those with ancestral roots to Africa and those who come from Jamaica, Nigeria, or other countries that have people with physical characteristics of similar nature. "Black" also includes recent and long past migrants. The point here is to understand that White dominant culture categorizes all members of the African Diaspora similarly, categorizing Blacks in the same racial category and impacting people with these physical characteristics in similar ways. It is inferred in this research that all members of the African Diaspora will have similar experiences while they are students at a White Community College.

[7]"White" is referencing the color of skin of the dominant group and all associated privileges conferred to people in that group merely because of white skin. In addition to being the color

of skin of people in U.S. society who have the predominance of power (economic, social, and political power), white or whiteness is normative, and therefore invisible (McIntosh 1988). Once a characteristic such as skin color becomes normative, then all other skin colors are measured against it, and considered to be lacking. The worth of people with skin color other than white are measured by the degree of difference of skin appearance from the normative whiteness. This is a fundamental element supporting systems of stratification based on race.

[8]American community colleges operate in all states, except for the District of Columbia. The Territories of Guam and American Samoa, and the commonwealths of Northern Mariana and Puerto Rico all have one or more accredited community colleges (www.utexas.edu/world/comcol/state/).

[9]Microaggressions are subtle insults directed toward people of color. These insults can be verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual. Microaggressions exist in both the academic and social spaces in the collegiate environment, and have a negative impact on campus racial climate (Solorzano 2000).

[10]"Discourse broadly includes both textual and spoken forms of language and refers to language production as it is organized external to the unitary sentence or clause" (Delamater 2003). In critical analysis, discourse also factors in social criticism with the analysis of textual material. The particular speech act includes three variables of power, affect, and utility. "Power has to do with the relative statuses of parties, affect with the emotionality of their relationship, and utility with the value and costs to both the source and target of a speech act in achieving some result" (Delamater 2003).

[11]See note 4.

[12]Dominant groups rely on the norms of dominant language usage and construction to maintain symbolic dominance. Subordinate groups may use "code switching" (that is, shifting from one linguistic style or language to another) to resist, redefine, or accommodate normative definitions (Nilep 2006).

[13]See note 7.

[14]See note 4.

[15]Black females fare better at all levels of education. They have higher graduation rates at the four-year level than their male counterparts, and earn two-thirds of all Bachelor's Degrees awarded to Blacks. They also outpace Black males in graduate fields: as of 2004, Black women earned 71 percent of all Master's Degrees and 62 percent of all professional degrees awarded to Blacks (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2007:49).

[16]Standpoint: "Standpoint epistemology [and methodology] is based on the assumption that in a hierarchically structured social word, different standpoints are necessarily produced. For example, the United States has a long history of involvement in genocide and slavery and

continued racial inequality. This constitutes an environment that is hierarchically structured along economic, social and political lines based on the construct of race and/or ethnicity. In such a context people have different visions of the world based on the racial categorization that they embody and their corresponding space in the social structure, which, as implied, is hierarchical and thus differentiated" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

[17]"Assimilation is the state of being assimilated; where people of different backgrounds come to see themselves as part of a larger national family. It is also referred to as the social process of absorbing one cultural group into harmony with another" (http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=assimilation). In critical analysis, during assimilation, there is a loss of the subordinate group's culture as they adopt cultural traits from the dominant group. Assimilation can be voluntary, or forced by the dominant group onto subordinate groups.

[18]Performative: If the meanings of race are constantly constructed and reconstructed in social performances of individuals, based on socio-historical understandings of race, then the status of race and what it means to be a certain race is considered to be performative. Most often, these performances are based on normative understandings of race in a particular society. The individual race performances tend to support the dominant definition, thereby supporting any normative understandings of differences between races in that particular society. In that way, these performances support uneven the power distribution between races. Judith Butler (1988) applies this understanding of performativity to the status of gender: "We signal our gender identification through an ongoing performance of normative acts that are ritually specific, drawing on well-worked-over, sociohistorical scripts and easily recognizable scenarios" (p591-531).

[19]These six steps, according to Creswell (1998), are:

1) Data Managing: Create and organize files for data.
2) Reading and Memorizing: Read through the text, make margin notes and form initial codes.
3) Describing: Describe the meaning of the experience for the researcher.
4) Classifying: Find and list statements of meaning for the individuals. Group statements into meaning units.
5) Interpreting: Develop a textural description, "what happened". Develop a structural description, "How" the phenomenon was experienced. Develop an overall description of the experience, the "essence".
6) Representing and Visualizing: Present narration of the 'essence' of the experience; use tables or figures of statements and meaning units" (p. 148-149).